TO HIM I OWE MY LIFE

Lt. K. S. SHAHABUDDIN
Royal Pakistan Navy

PRINTERS AND PUBLISHERS
LAHORE PESHAWAR KARACHI

Autobio of a Sailor

Mil. Sc

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1st Ed

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Ferozsons

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FOREWORD.

Lieutenant Shahabuddin's book is a clear and unvarnished account of the experience of a young sailor as a prisoner of war in Japanese hands from 1942 to the end of the War.

The author modestly omits to mention that, for his part in the action in which the S. S. CHILKA was sunk, he was decorated and in addition was awarded the Lloyds War Medal.

Throughout his three long years of captivity he was sustained through privation, torture, and in some cases the ingratitude of his fellow prisoners, by a sincere and growing realisation of the power of his religion.

The result was, that, an experience which might have shattered many a young man both physically and mentally, merely served to strengthen his character and enabled him to endure a very rough time indeed with philosophy and courage.

J. W. JEFFORD,
Rear Admiral,
Commander-in-Chief,
Royal Pakistan Navy.

Karachi, June 16th, 1952.

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PREFACE

I am glad that I have been able to write an account of my experiences as a Japanese Prisoner of War during the Second World War. It is a straightforward narration of my experiences from day to day during those long and weary years.

I was serving as a Cadet in the S.S. "Chilka" of the British India Steam Navigation Co., Ltd., when she was attacked and sunk by a Japanese submarine in the Indian Ocean in March, 1942. I was wounded in action and with these wounds spent six days in a life boat with the rest of the crew of the ship. We landed on an Island about 80 miles off the West coast of Sumatra.

Two other officers and I were admitted in a missionary hospital in a small village while the rest of the officers and men were taken to the capital of the island, a town named Goonoongsitoli.

The Japanese invaded the island a month later and took us prisoners.

I was then a young man of eighteen years, fresh from the training ship. I had hardly seen life when I was called upon to face and endure the hardships that confronted me. But thanks to the Lord Almighty, He was kind to me and through His blessings He equipped me with unlimited patience and courage, which actually enabled me to go through the worst experience of my life.

You will read how I began to realise the Greatness of God Almighty and how each new experience led me nearer to Him. It is He who sustained me throughout those long years or else I would have collapsed and perished.

Perhaps the experiences of an unknown young man are not worth any attention. But I hope this book will enable the reader to realise the Greatness of God and the way He extends His mercies and blessings to His creatures.

I had completed writing this account four years ago. It might have remained on my file (partly typed and partly hand written), only to be read by the few who knew me. It would never have taken the form of a book had it not been for the keenness and enthusiasm shown by my eldest brother, K. Zakiuddin. He took the rough manuscript from me and had a fairtyped copy made. He did most of the typing himself during his spare time after spending long hours in the Bank. My grateful acknowledgements and sincere thanks are due to him. I am also grateful to Ferozsons who have bravely taken up the publishing of this book. My thanks are due to Captain Nur Ahmad Hussain, F. F. R. tloo for designing the dust cover. Last but not the east, I thank all who have directly or indirectly helped in the printing of the book.

K. S. Shahabuddin

June 27, 1952.



Lieut. (Sp) K. S. Shahabuddin, R. P. N.

CHAPTER I

As long as I live, December 1941 will remain fresh in my memory. It was in that month that Japan declared war on England and America and immediately sent out her planes to bomb Pearl Harbour and other Allied positions in the Far East. At the same time her submarines began prowling in Far Eastern waters, sinking Allied ships. For the first time in the history of India our Motherland was threatened by an Eastern invasion. There was panic in every part of the country. Those living near or around Calcutta were sending their families to the interior for fear of bombing. Railway stations, railway carriages, steamer Ghats and steamers were all over-crowded. Not only was transport in chaos but to journey to any part of India was to do so at the risk of life and limb. Everywhere people could talk of nothing else but the possibility of Japanese bombing and the rapid advance of the Japanese forces.

It was during these perilous days that I passed out of the I.M.M.T.S. '*Dufferin*' after completing three years of training as a cadet in the Indoia Mercantile Marine. Three more years of practical training at sea still lay ahead of me before I could hope to become an officer. I had a month's leave and then early in January 1942 I was appointed Cadet on board the S.S. *Chilka* of the B. I. S. N. Company.

This news was not at all pleasent for my parents, though they never showed it. Perhaps only parents themselves will know what it meant to my mother and father to have to part with me at a time when death had become a routine matter at sea. I am certain that in those anxious days peaceful sleep was impossible for them, and I take off my hat to them for the magnificent way they behaved. They let myself, and my two brothers, go wherever we wanted to go, let us do whatever we wanted to do, as long as it was for our own and our country's good. As for them, they waited—waited with closed lips and hearts full of patience, with courage and faith in Allah, praying in silence to God Almighty for our safety and progress. At this time my eldest brother was studying in England and was undergoing the dangers of the German 'blitz'. My second brother was then a Lieutenant in the Army and was awaiting orders to go to the front.

On the 11th January 1942 I left my home in Calcutta and reported to the Commander of the S.S. *Chilka*. The good old *Chilka* was lying in No. 1 Esplanade Moorings opposite the Outram Ghat. Mother, aunts, grannies, brothers, sisters, and cousins accompanied me to the riverside. I said good-bye to all of them and then boarded a dinghy to go to the "sea-horse" moored to the buoys in the stream. As I approached, I scanned her from top to bottom and from bow to stern. The *Chilka* looked beautiful in

her wartime grey paint. She was a semi-cargo ship, carrying passengers as well as cargo and plying between Rangoon and the Coromandel coast. But now she had been commandeered by the Government and was being fitted with guns and anti-magnetic-mine devices, for she was to carry troops to the war front. When my dinghy went alongside I climbed the gangway, the "Sucanny" on watch had my gear brought up and I was directed to the Captain's cabin. After asking me a few questions, Capt. W. Bird, the Commander, then sent me down to the Chief Officer.

Mr. Green, the Chief Officer, was tall, handsome and well-built. He had a heavy voice but there was a kindly twinkle in his eye. Chief Officers are not usually very kind and as the Cadet is directly under him it is always a blessing to have a good Mate and to me, who was going to the sea for the first time, it was a great relief to find in Mr. Green just the kind of man any Cadet would like to have —a thorough gentleman.

There was another Cadet on board, Ghansham Soni from the Punjab. He and I had been together on the *Dufferin*, though he had been a year senior to me there and now had already put in a year's sea-time. It was he who was detailed to take me round the ship and having lived together in the same surroundings for two years, Soni and I had plenty to talk about. If he was able to acquaint

me with the routine of the *Chilka* I, for my part, had plenty to tell him about all that had happened on board the *Dufferin* during the year since he left. It is really a pleasure to meet an old *Dufferin* boy. We can talk for hours without exhausting our subject, telling each other how we worried the officers and the teachers and how we passed "the good old days". I will not attempt to write about the *Dufferin* here because that in itself would make a book. However, I must mention that amongst those on board the *Chilka*, we had another ex-*Dufferin* Cadet, the Fifth Engineer, Mr. C. G. K. Reddy. You will meet him in the coming chapters.

The first days on the *Chilka* were for me the achievement of a boyhood ambition. For eighteen years I had longed to be in a ship and now I was there. My day began at seven, when I reported to the Chief Officer. He would then tell me what I had to do. Most of the time I had to look after the shore-crew working on board. At times I had to go to the 'tween and lower decks and arrange the life-jackets and I also spent a part of my time inspecting the life-boat gear. At 5 p.m. I knocked off and the Chief Officer, knowing that my home was in Calcutta, allowed me to go ashore every evening while we were still in port. After a few days we moved into the Kidderpore Docks to load coal, and after this dirty work was over the troops started pouring in.

It was the evening of the 22nd January, and as we were to leave Calcutta the next day I went ashore to say good-bye to my parents and relations. My favourite dishes were cooked for dinner. The table was full and it was pleasant to eat amongst my dear relatives. After dinner green tea was served in the drawing-room and as we drank it we chatted away. Uncle Nazimuddin took the lead in the conversation, entertaining us with stories of his college life in England and with tales of our family when it was at the height of its honour and glory. He talked so well that, listening to him, we did not notice the passage of time. The clock struck two and all of us wished that the hands had not moved so quickly—but time cannot stand still. I had to go, and yet none of us could leave our seats. It was not just that we were spell-bound by my uncle's talk, but that there was also so much love amongst us. We could not bear to part. But it was the will of Allah that we must part and so, submitting ourselves to Fate, we left our seats and went down the steps to the portico.

The inevitable hour had come. I shook hands with all my brothers and sisters, uncles and cousins and aunts. My father embraced me and wished me God speed. Last of all I took leave of my mother. She grasped me tight with her arms and kissed me all over the face, each time uttering 'Bismilla-hir-Rahma-nir-Rahim'. I could see the tears of happiness in her eyes, the sign, the surest

sign, that my pious mother was submitting herself to the will of God and was leaving me under His care and protection. 'Khuda Hafiz' (May God be your Protector) ! she said, and then I withdrew from her embrace. I was feeling bad, terribly bad, but I managed to keep smiling and never allowed my tears to flow. This was going to be my first voyage to the sea and, in spite of this emotional send-off, I was quite excited about the voyage.

Next morning, at eight o'clock, the Harbour Master boarded our ship and we started moving out of the docks. The previous night we had decided that my father, mother and other relatives would go to the Botanical Gardens, from where they would be able to watch my ship as it went down the river. As I had expected, while we were passing the Botanics I saw a line of them, standing on the shore. I was on 'station duty', on the forecastle head, and I was not able to wave to them. It was an unforgettable moment and one that could never come again. I was really and truly on my way to the sea. Impossible to describe how I felt as, at about midday, we finally moved out of their sight.

I spent that first day on the bridge, keeping watch with the Second Officer, Mr. Feast—a middle-aged Englishman, quiet, lean and thin. Unfortunately he was slightly deaf which meant saying the same thing twice to him, but he took an interest in me and tried his best to instruct me in navigation as the ship moved slowly down the river.

The other two persons on the bridge were a 'Succany' (helmsman) at the wheel, and the Pilot. I watched the Pilot with keen interest. Each time he gave an order the 'Succany' would repeat it and then change our course. And so we steamed down the Hooghly. At 4 p.m. we were relieved of our watch by the Chief Officer, Mr. Green. The next day, when I got up at 7 o'clock, I found that we were in the open sea. It was the first time I had ever seen it.

CHAPTER II.

The *Chilka's* first port of call was Akyab in Burma. This little port, with its open harbour and aerodrome, was to become of great importance during the war with Japan. First the Japanese were to occupy it and use it as an air-base, and later it was to be recaptured by the Allies and once again used as a base for bombing enemy positions in Lower Burma. For me, however, it was important because it was the first place I had ever visited outside India.

We spent two days in Akyab, landing and loading and unloading troops and ammunition, and by the evening of the third day we were already out at sea again on our way to Rangoon. This voyage was tense. We had heard that two Allied ships had been sunk in the Bay of Bengal, and our course lay right across the area where the ships were reported to have been sunk. The skipper sent for the three naval gunners we had on board and told them to keep a good look-out. He also told them to train us in the art of handling a gun.

The *Chilka* had a three inch high-angle gun in the stern and two bren-guns on either side of the "monkey-island" above the navigation bridge.

The gun-crew, which now consisted of the three naval gunners, the Second Mate, the Third Mate, Soni and myself, had intensive gun practice for the two days we were at sea. The gun was not actually fired but we had to get to know it and learn our gun-drill. Extra look-outs were stationed on the bridge, the forecastle head and the stern. We also had a man in the crows' nest. Each day and each night many pairs of eyes scanned the horizon, and the sea around us, for hostile craft, for a periscope or the wake of a torpedo. But luck was with us and the *Chilka* was still to remain afloat. The evening of the 28th January 1942 saw us steaming safely up the Irrawaddy river with the Rangoon Pilot. But as we approached the town, we heard the distant thud of bombs—an air-raid was in progress. It did not seem safe for us to go in, so we dropped anchor. The soldiers on board our ship stood by their guns and prepared themselves for action, but action was still not to come our way, at least not yet. We could hear the steady drone of planes and the bombs falling far away, and then came silence. Soon we were alongside a jetty in Rangoon.

Rangoon, with its world-famous pagoda, was once one of the most beautiful ports of the East. Ships of all countries visited it. But now in January 1942 Rangoon was not its old self. Where once had stood huge buildings, there were now piles of debris. Shops were closed and bungalows deserted. Many people had already fled into the

interior, hoping to get to India by the long and dangerous land-route ; still more were hoping to get away by sea, but few passages were available and so it was no surprise to us when, after five days in port unloading coal, we were given orders to prepare the ship for a number of passengers.

On the morning of the 3rd February, the *Chilka*, spick and span and free from the slightest trace of coal-dust, lay alongside the main jetty while passengers of all nationalities poured into her. There were over three thousand eight hundred evacuees. The first and second classes were full and you could scarcely move on the decks for people. Within a few hours all the passengers were aboard. The chains holding the *Chilka* were cut and she left the quay. From time to time the bridge telegraphs clanged. On the bridge the Pilot walked from side to side to see that everything was clear, while the Captain, looking more important than ever, stood firmly in one place, his presence alone enough to ensure all orders being carried out promptly. The *Chilka* was now under way.

The sun was setting, a crimson disk in a cloudless sky. Slowly, almost wearily, it disappeared behind the horizon. An evening breeze blew gently from the North, but nothing disturbed the calm waters of the Irrawaddy save the wash of our ship, leaving once again the port she had visited so many times. But this departure was to be a

memorable one for it was to be her last. The last for nearly all of those three thousand eight hundred refugees. Many of them had spent all their lives in Burma, and now they were homeless and in flight, leaving behind them not only their property but all their hopes and memories, all the small everyday things that had made up the fabric of their lives.

As we steamed down the river, the passengers crowded along the port-side to have a last view of the land where they had been born and bred. The first wave of the war had made them homeless; now they were going to a new land to start a new life. But for the moment their thoughts were all for the old and there was sobbing and crying, weeping and wailing. It was a pitiable scene and as I recall it there, my heart aches again for those homeless people.

The sun set and night came down on us. It was pitch dark when we dropped the Pilot and entered the open sea. A complete black-out was in force and all the port-holes had to be kept closed. Conditions for the lower and 'tween-deck passengers became appalling, people were packed in like sardines and, because of the black-out, there was no fresh air at all. In the course of my duties I had to visit these decks from time to time, but one visit was enough to make me wish that I might not have to do so again. Arrangements for food and water for the passengers were non-existent, and I am sorry to say that the crew of the ship took

advantage of the situation to sell their own food at exorbitant prices. Many of the refugees had to go without food completely.

Now that Japanese submarines had found their way to the Bay of Bengal, this voyage had become one of great responsibility for the Captain. The sinking of his ship would mean the loss of over three thousand lives, and the *Chilka* was also carrying millions of rupees worth of silver intended for the Central Bank in India. At night every precaution had to be taken to prevent the slightest beam of light being seen from outside, and to ensure this Soni and I used to go round the lower decks to sea that no lights were being used. Everywhere on the ship there were posters warning the passengers not to use torches, as these might endanger the safety of all those on board. One night in the 'tween-decks as I was feeling my way past the sleeping passengers to a light which I had seen a hundred feet ahead, I heard a sweet voice repeating again and again, "Torches must not be used." A girl of sixteen, on the look-out for my approach, was passing on the warning. But the dull-head using the torch was too slow and a few seconds later I was demanding its surrender. I gave him my address and told him to reclaim it from me after our arrival in Calcutta,—but he was never to do so.

As a rule the relations of ships' officers are not allowed to travel by the ship on which they work, but on this occasion the rule was relaxed so that

our officers might take their families away from Burma. Soni's mother, sister and a little brother had been living in Mandalay, and on our arrival in Rangoon he had been given leave to fetch them. It was unthinkable that they should have to spend the voyage living on the lower deck, so Soni and I, who shared a cabin, moved out and slept on the upper deck. We were not the only ones to make use of the upper deck in this way and indeed, during the day, many of the lower deck passengers came up for some much-needed fresh air. One morning there was great excitement among the passengers, even panic, when we spotted a surface craft in the distance. But they soon calmed down once they had been convinced that it was an Allied ship.

To the passengers in the lower deck that voyage in the *Chilka* must have been the worst experience of their lives. Their relief, when we picked up the Pilot at the mouth of the Hooghly, was indescribable. In a few hours they would be out of the dungeon that the lower deck had become. They would have fresh air to breathe, freedom to move amd also, most important of all, food. Members of the Evacuee Relief Committee met the ship in Calcutta, bringing the desperately-needed food on board.

My own problem was how to get word to my relatives that I had arrived. Fortunately, among the Customs Officers who came on board, was an

old friend of mine, and I asked him to ring up my people. Within a few minutes of receiving my message they had motored down to the Outram Ghat. I met them on the jetty but could not go home with them then, as our work was not finished. But the next day and the days that followed were a delight, marred only by the news that my brother had left for the Burma Front only a couple of days before my arrival.

All too soon my ship was loaded and was once again ready to go to sea. Our departure was fixed for the 15th of February and as my mother and aunt were to leave for Aligarh a few days later, my farewell this time was even more emotional than the previous one.

Our convoy of four ships, all laden with troops and escorted by two cruisers, was headed for Rangoon but just as we were approaching the mouth of the Irrawaddy, we received a signal from the escort to turn round and return to Calcutta to the same jetty from which we had gone a few days before. Uncle Nazimuddin was listening to the radio when I stepped into his drawing room, and his astonishment at seeing me back home again so soon was only surpassed by his joy. Then my father came in and his excitement knew no bounds. That same day my father had received a letter from my brother Wasi, the one who had gone to Burma, and so a wire was sent to my mother in Aligarh, telling her that we were both

still safe and sound. But with my mother gone and my aunts and the children too not being there, our rented house in Calcutta seemed strangely empty and I could not bear to stay there. So every evening, after seeing my father and my uncle, I used to go over to my grandmother's house in Theatre Road.

My family's pleasure in my unexpected return was soon, however, to be eclipsed by bad news from Aligarh. My younger brother, Shahed, had an attack of typhoid which caused us all great anxiety. His condition became so bad that all hope of his recovery was given up. To add to this worry, the *Chilka* was due to leave Calcutta again for an unknown destination. Twice our departure was cancelled, and so it happened that when I went home for yet a third time to say good-bye, my father had gone. He had left for Aligarh the night before, as my brother's condition had become very grave. I dined with my uncles Nazimuddin and Nooruddin, little knowing that it would be three and a half years before I tasted home food again.

After saying good-bye to them I went over to Rennie's. Rennie, or to give him his full name, Renendra Kumar Palit, was an old friend of my school days at St. Paul's, Darjeeling, in 1937. Another friend, Minnie Sen, was also there. For three hours we talked, and then we walked round the Dhakuria lakes under the bright moonlight. We left Minnie at his house and Rennie and I

walked on until we found a taxi. In the early hours of the first day of March our hands met in a warm clasp, and it was good-bye.

There are certain days in a man's life that are later seen to have had tremendous significance. Such a day was the First of March for me. That early spring morning was memorable in itself. Winter had gone, but there was a trace of winter in the cold breeze coming off the sea. At the hour that I had to report three quarters of the population was asleep, but here in the docks clusters of workmen were getting ready to work. Fires were burning, tea was being prepared. The *Chilka* was alive with excitement. The Harbour Master came aboard, chains were cut, the telegraphs clanged. Now and again the Harbour Master would shout at the men on the chain-boat to hurry up and let go the shackle. It was the last of the ebb and we drifted down the river, stern foremost. At Garden Reach the Pilot boarded. He turned the ship round and down the river we went at full speed. The tall buildings of Calcutta disappeared one by one till the town was no longer in sight, and by midnight we were out of the river. Thus started my third voyage to the sea, the voyage that marked a turn in my life.

Soni was not with us on this trip—nor as a matter of fact was Mr. Green, the Chief Officer, who had been so kind to me. I missed them both, but fortunately the other old *Dufferin* boy,

Reddy, was still with us and as our off-watch hours were the same, most of my spare time came to be spent in his cabin. Reddy, who comes from a very good family in Madras, was a born organiser with a high sense of responsibility, and during the period I was with him he gave me a lot of good advice and helped me in every possible way. He was the Fifth Engineer Officer on board, and one of my *duties was to give him the ship's position every evening. A very essential duty, too, as otherwise every one would be completely stranded if the ship were sunk.

Day after day we changed our course, all the time keeping parallel to and just thirty miles off the coast of India. The Captain, under orders, had still not disclosed our destination. Even we, the navigating officers who plotted the ships' course on the chart, did not know where our journey was to end and during meal times there were a lot of arguments and discussions about it.

There was also a great deal of speculation and unrest amongst the crew. These poor people were very worried, because just before the *Chilka* left, they had heard rumours that the Army was evacuating certain villages in Chittagong. The crew had their families there, and they could not imagine how their womenfolk, most of whom had never once been outside their villages, would adapt themselves to the new conditions of the

* This was not a part of my duty. In his own interest reddy had asked me to keep him in the picture as he would have needed it in order that he might know where to direct the life-boat if he was left in charge of one.

move without their help. They had tried to "signoff" before the ship left, but as they could not produce proof that their families were being evacuated their demands had been passed over. The crew then decided to demand a general discharge from the Captain and the whole lot of them, led by their Serang, saw the Captain and appealed to him to sign them all off. But by that time it was too late. The ship was already under way and the Captain rightly replied that he could do nothing for the time being. He gave his promise, however, that he would discharge them at the first port of call.

On the seventh day when we were off the coast of Ceylon we altered our course towards the South-East. We now knew for certain that we would be in for some excitement. To gain confidence we tried out our guns as, still zigzagging, we went towards Sumatra, the land of cocoanuts, bananas and beautiful girls.

CHAPTER III

Since my boyhood days I had dreamed about those islands in the Indian Ocean. But this was hardly the time to be going there, with bombs falling and enemy troops expected to land at any moment.

The *Chilka* was now crossing the Indian Ocean on her way to the Dutch East Indies. Each day took us further away from our home port. We had no escorts and there were no other ships in sight. Our only companions were the whales which had been keeping us company ever since we left the coast of Ceylon. These whales, which were not very big, came to the surface in pairs and after breathing in fresh air, disappeared again. I used to enjoy watching their amusing antics.

I had now been at sea for over a week, the longest voyage I had ever made; but I did not feel a bit homesick, nor did I feel frightened at the idea of my ship being torpedoed. Indeed I never thought of such things. I was beginning to like my work and to take an interest in it. I kept watch with Mr. Feast, the slightly deaf second Mate, and he was as unfailingly patient as ever,

teaching me all he could about navigation. During my spare time in the morning I studied navigation and seamanship for a while and then wrote letters. I also kept the diary * that has since grown into this book.

The night of the 10th March saw us in the midst of a storm—heavy rain accompanied by thunder and lightning. The 11th was a dull day with exceptionally poor visibility and there was no sign of the weather clearing. I remember the ship's doctor, Dr. Mason, remarking on it during lunch. He was very pleased about it as it meant we would be hidden from submarines. I do not remember exactly what we had on the menu on that never to be forgotten day. There was really nothing special about it at all. As usual I did full justice to the food and then returned to the bridge to continue my watch, which was from midday to 4 p.m. I would stand in one place for a while and then walk from wing to wing of the bridge. Now and again I would pick up the telescope and scan the horizon from side to side, with an immense feeling of relief at finding a clear path before us. The rest of the time I attended to altering the course of the ship. In those days we steered zigzag courses and so every five or ten minutes a bell on the clock would ring and then we would put the ship on a new course. The Second Officer let me do this work.

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* This is not correct. The diary that I had kept went down with the ship. Whatever I have written is from memory. I am lucky to have remembered most of the incidents.

We were now a little over 300 miles from Padang, our destination. That morning the Captain had given orders to the Chief Steward to have the cabins made ready for passengers, as he expected to be in port the next evening. The most critical part of our voyage was beginning. As we drew near Sumatra we could expect air attacks, probably there was danger from submarines as well.

I think it was about twenty minutes to two when Mr. Feast pointed out to me, in the distance, some disturbed water, rather like that of the wake of a ship, but in a streamlined shape. It was moving away from us. The two of us picked up our telescopes and stared at it. But as no part of it was visible over the surface, the Second Officer assured me that it was "only a whale". However, he told me to keep an eye on it and went into the chart room to do something he felt to be more important. Believe me, my hair stands up on end even now when I think of it. I kept my eyes fixed on that moving shape of water till it was far astern and I could see no more. When it disappeared I gave up looking and put the telescope back. For a few minutes longer I remained on the starboard wing of the bridge, still gazing hard at the wide expanse that lay before us. It had stopped raining and I was happy to see the weather clearing up—the bridge can be a very unpleasant place on a rainy day.

Just then the telephone bell rang. The telephone bell? Yes, but it was very unusual for the

bell to ring at that time, in mid-ocean. If we had been anchoring, the Chief Officer might have rung up or the engineers might have asked how long it would be before we needed the engines again. But now, in the open sea and moving at full speed, that could only mean there was something wrong. I went into the wheel-house to see what it was all about. The Second Mate had picked up the receiver. I saw him put it down and run out of the wheel-house. I called to him but I got no answer, and so I followed him to the door of the Captain's cabin where I stood while he went in to wake him up. The Captain was having a nap after his midday-meal, but it did not take him a flash of a second to come running out with Mr. Feast. As they passed me the Captain said, "See if you can see anything". I moved to the port-wing of the bridge, and there quite plainly was a submarine breaking surface. "A submarine on the port quarter, sir," I reported. There was a peculiar feeling in my stomach and the beats of my heart increased.

And so in spite of all our precautions we had come across an enemy craft. As the submarine surfaced, six men clad in white came out of a door and stood by the gun on the fore-deck. There was a flash of lightning and then smoke came out with an explosion. A second later there was a heavy splash in the water about half a mile from us. The flat-eyed, yellow-skinned Japs had opened fire on us.

What were we to do now ? This was the most critical moment for our Captain. He was the one person who could decide on our course of action. He had been a Captain for many years, but no responsibility could have been heavier than the one that fell on his shoulders at this moment. The *Chilka* was not a man-of-war. We were not intended for fighting. All the same we had a three-inch high-angle gun in the stern for self-defence. The submarine had already attacked us. Surrendering would have meant giving over the ship—and the crew—to the enemy. Also if the Japanese were to get hold of our code book, the submarine would find out the positions of other Allied ships and probably sink them too. For a few seconds the Commander stood immobile. Were we going to open fire ? If so, there was no time to waste. And yet that little gun of ours in the stern was no match against the two six-inch guns of the submarine. To us standing there with him, an age seemed to pass until we saw by the firm set of his jaw that told us the Commander had decided what we were to do. In fact, the moment the Jap shell fell in the water half a mile from us, the order for 'action stations' had been given; in the flash of a second the Skipper had made his decision and translated it into words. We were to defend ourselves from the enemy and at the same time try to run away.

The Second Mate and I left our telescopes on the rake and disappeared from the bridge. I went

straight to my cabin, took my tin hat and sprinted full speed towards the gun. All the fear that I had felt at the first sight of the submarine had now vanished. I was full of energy and high spirits. My one aim now was to get to the gun. Our gun platform was right in the stern of the ship and had no cover. The six of us (the three naval gunners, the Second Mate, the Third Mate and I) reached the gun almost simultaneously and at once started replying to the fire of the submarine. The Japanese gunners were more accurate than we were. They had already scored a number of direct hits on our ship, most of the boats on the boat-deck had been damaged, while our shots were falling short—the submarine was probably out of range of our smaller gun. Meanwhile the rest of the crew, with the exception of the firemen, had collected in the number three 'tween-deck. The firemen on duty could not leave the engine-room and were working frantically to keep the ship going at full speed. Unfortunately our gun was soon to be put out of action, making further resistance impossible. And then, as a result of accurate shooting and perfect marksmanship, the Jap gunners managed to score a direct hit on our ammunition locker.

There was a flash like lightning, followed by a terrific explosion. The next moment my tin hat hit the deck behind me and I was flat on my back with huge flames on my left side and my left hand right inside the fire. For a few moments

I lay there, helpless and half-stunned, expecting to be burned to death. And then the next moment I found myself on my feet and running towards the gun. Mr. Feast, the Third Mate and the three gunners were still standing there, the first two soaked in blood from head to foot. One of the gunners had lost both his hands.

The gun itself was now useless and we decided to retreat. With difficulty Mr. Feast, who was covered with shrapnel wounds all over his body, managed to get up to the bridge to report to the Captain that the gun was out of action. The Third Mate and two of the gunners went away to take cover, and I started to go forward. The gunner who had lost his hands was sitting helplessly near the ship's side, a heart-rending look of appeal in his bulging grey eyes. But my own burned hands had become so stiff that I could not move my fingers, and I too was soaked in blood from head to foot. There was nothing I could do but stumble past him and up the ladder towards the first class saloon. There I saw the Chief Officer, Mr. Andrew, walking up and down the alley-way. I remember noting, almost with surprise, that he had his water-proof on and that he had tied his dagger to his belt. For his part he took one look at me and then he rushed into the pantry, came out with a clean table-cloth and started bandaging my wounds.

Though our gun was out of action, our ship was still moving at full speed and the Captain was still

trying his best to run away from the submarine, but the submarine gave chase, firing at us the whole time. Each time a shell struck the ship, the old *Chilka* would shudder and the Chief Officer, who was bandaging my right arm, would immediately sit down and then a few seconds later solemnly stand up again. This might have been the right thing to do, but it struck me as funny and I started laughing—I was probably a little hysterical. The Chief Steward, I remember, was there too, a grand old man, sixty-three years of age, with over forty years of service at sea to his credit. He was as calm and cool-headed as anyone in action, and now he brought me a glass of water which he helped me to drink. Feeling a little better, I staggered towards the saloon door, but collapsed again into a chair. A moment later the Third Officer came in with a bottle of whisky in his hands and sat on the chair opposite to me. He offered me some whisky, but I refused it as I thought it could make my condition no better. Then the Second Officer was brought in and was laid on the floor. The Third Officer who, I now realise, was very badly wounded in the lungs, lay down on the floor too—he could not sit up any longer.

It was at this point that Mr. Dixon Mason, the ship's doctor, came in. He did not even ask me how I was, and obviously had no intention of making the perilous journey back to his cabin to fetch medical supplies. Fortunately for all of us, however, Mr. Abdul Karim, the Storekeeper,

a man of splendid courage, went to the doctor's cabin to fetch his First Aid kit and proper bandages. The thick tablecloth was then taken off my right arm and a proper bandage substituted. A few moments later we heard six short blasts followed by a long one on the steam-whistle—the signal to abandon ship. Next moment there were only three of us, all severely wounded, left in the saloon.

I staggered to my feet, but I saw the Second and Third Mates lying there and made no attempt to move further. For a moment I gave up hope and saw myself, in a flood of self-pity, staying there for ever and going down with the ship. Fortunately for me the Third Officer shouted, "Go on, what are you waiting for?". "I can't go, leaving you here." I said. "You can walk. Can't you? Well for God's sake get a move on". With great difficulty I made my way to my cabin, where I managed to get my cap and my purse and then went down, I don't quite know why, to the lower decks. There I found the doctor completely dazed and shaking from head to foot. I asked him where I should go, firstly because the lifeboat of which I was to have been in charge had been blown to bits, and secondly because, being wounded, I imagined he would want me in the same boat as himself. But the doctor ran away from me without answering my question, and so I went up to the boat-deck, where the Chief Officer led me to boat No. 2.

This boat was just being lowered and when I told the Captain that I would not be able to use my hands to go down the jacobs ladder, he and the Serang caught hold of me quickly and pushed me in. Now the men who were slacking away the boat-falls were highly excited and one man would slack away a lot more than the others. The result was that the boat at times became almost perpendicular to the water. On such occasions I clung desperately to the thwart, praying that I would not fall and feeling that I could not stand even the thought of salt water on my wounds and burns. However, the boat was safely lowered and the crew started coming down the jacob's ladder. To my amazement among the swarm of people on the ladder were the two officers whom I had left lying in the saloon. Life is so precious that somehow they had managed to get there and were now half way down. Above and below them the ladder was wedged solid with men, including the Radio Operator who weighed 19 stones and was so fat that he could hardly touch his shin bone. This massive figure somehow or other got stuck just below them. He could neither come down nor go up and was holding up all those above him. The two wounded officers were beginning to feel the strain and they could not be kept waiting much longer. Someone from the top shouted to the Radio Operator either to go on down or to let go. The poor fellow chose to let go, falling with a tremendous splash between the lifeboat and the ship's side.

There was a big swell on and the boat was pitching and tossing, but some of the Khalasies very sensibly got hold of the oars and fended her off from the ship's side, while the others got busy trying to help the Radio Operator into the boat. But it was very difficult. He was very heavy and the thick overcoat which he was wearing made things still more difficult. However, after a long struggle he was pulled up, breathing like a bloater. By now all the others had come down, including the Captain. We shoved off and began to pull. Just then we heard somebody shout for help from the upper deck. It was a coal-trimmer who had been badly wounded in the leg. In the general rush for the boat not one of the crew had thought of giving him a hand, but somehow the man had managed to drag himself up to the boat deck. Fortunately the Chief Steward was also there and together they came down the ladder.

And now we rowed for our lives to get away from the ship's side. We were between the ship and the submarine and at any moment the Japs might open fire again, though since the signal to abandon ship, firing had ceased. The whole ship's company were trying to get away in five life-boats, even the gunner who had lost his hands had managed to dive into one of the boats while it was being lowered. But no, not the whole of the ship's company, for just then we caught sight of our purser and another of the crew on a raft on the other side of the ship. They called for

help but we left the other boat, which was nearer, to pick them up, our main objective now being to get as far away from the ship as we could and as quickly as possible, especially as we had the Captain with us. As we had expected, the Japanese began to fire again. Three shots, and the *Chilka*'s bows went up and the stern was well below the surface. She then listed to port and disappeared from our view. Just before the water closed over her, the steam-whistle gave a long blast as if saying good-bye. And that was the end of the good old *Chilka*.

With the *Chilka* gone, our only hope of ever reaching land lay in the little life boat, if the Japanese meant to give us even that much chance of survival. What would the submarine do next? Our hearts were in our mouths. Would the enemy, following the terrible precedent of the Italians, machine-gun the lifeboat crews? Already we saw that they had captured one of our boats, yet the Captain, the man they most wanted for questioning, was in ours. Perhaps they would not recognise him as he lay huddled in his waterproof, all signs of rank hidden and a felt hat almost covering his eyes. As the crew pulled hard at the oars, he kept asking the Chief Officer, who was facing the stern, what the submarine was doing. So there we were, crowded into a small boat on the open sea—and with a Jap submarine nearby—right in the jaws of death. What would happen to us in the next moments? We all wondered.

CHAPTER IV.

SIX DAYS IN AN OPEN BOAT.

That was the end of the good old *Chilka*. She was now on her way to Davey Jones locker carrying with her all our belongings.

The purser and the crew on the raft were not to be seen any more. As for the boat the submarine had caught. Fortunately for the men in it there was not a single European Officer amongst them. The Jap Captain, finding it contained only Indian sailors, gave to each of them a tin full of hot water, a tin full of cold water and a tin of biscuits. The Japs also attended to a man who was slightly wounded above the eye and then they let the boat go, telling the men which course they should take. The submarine cruised round on the surface for a while, but did not go near any of the other boat. Finally it submerged.

We trimmed our sails and set a course towards the East hoping to get to Sumatra or one of the nearby islands. We did not communicate with each other, but all the five boats were heading East when the sun set and darkness shut us from each other's view. It was eight o'clock when

someone suggested that we were all hungry. The Captain had instructed the steward to look after the water tanks and now, on his orders, each of us was given a biscuit and two ounces of water. According to the Board of Trade regulations each life-boat must carry water, biscuits and milk for the number of passengers the life-boat is fit to carry.

I was lying on the starboard side thwart at the stern of the boat. The third officer, Mr. Hodges, was in midships very near me. The poor fellow had a shell splinter in his left lung, and each time he breathed we could hear the air wheezing from the hole in his chest. To add to my misery, the sea was not too calm, there were heavy swells following us from the back and each time our stern went down, the water rushed into our boat, soaking me from head to foot. I cannot describe how awful I felt when the salt water washed my burns, and I had a very uncomfortable night.

Next morning we found that ours was the only boat on the vast expanse of water: the other four boats had disappeared. It was a bright morning and the sea was calmer than the previous night. The Captain gave orders for the wounded to be moved to the fore part of the boat, telling the doctor to take charge of us, and so it came about that the three of us who had lain together

on the floor of the saloon, the Second Mate, the Third Mate, and myself, together with the wounded coal-trimmer now occupied the bow of the boat.

Of the four of us the Second Mate must have been the most uncomfortable, for he was wedged more or less upright against a coil of rope in the middle; I was lying on the port thwart with the coal-trimmer above me, while the Third Officer was on the starboard thwart. The rest of the officers and the crew sat up on the other thwarts and rowed in turns. Whenever we got a fair breeze, we put up our sails. During the day the sun shone brightly and the heat, without cover and under a burning sun, was intense. All of us prayed for rain, and when it did rain it rained good and hard, filling every bucket and tin pot and soaking us to the skin into the bargain. Some of the men squeezed water from their clothes into their mouths, but as my hands were useless, all I could do was to lie on my back, open my mouth and gulp down the rain water. The drop in temperature that came with the rain was very welcome, but at the same time, lying there soaking wet, I fully expected to catch pneumonia. We had to stay dripping wet until the sun came up again and dried our clothes.

I regret to say that our crew behaved very badly ; with very few exceptions they were panicky and reluctant to obey orders. In order to maintain discipline the Captain had to threaten to throw

their belongings overboard—many of them had got away from the ship with small packages containing clothes and blankets. The biggest nuisance was John, the Chinese carpenter. Every morning he stripped himself naked, and sat over the gunwale of the boat to ease himself while the crew abused him and he swore back at them.

The junior Marconi Officer sat next to me and gave me water when it was time to do so. We had four meals a day, each consisting of a biscuit and two ounces of water.

Time and time again we thought we had sighted land, but always it turned out to be a cloud instead. At night the coal-trimmer, lying above me with his feet towards my head, would toss and turn and in his agony move his wounded leg so that the blood spurted over my face. All I could do when this happened was to hold my breath for those few seconds. The wooden thwart on which I was lying was not particularly comfortable; there was an iron band below my back which kept sticking into my wound. For the first few days I had nothing to put under my head, but later on the Captain gave me his warm dressing gown for a pillow.

I think at first none of them bothered with me, thinking I must surely die. But somehow I myself never for one moment thought that I would die. Indeed I had a strong conviction that

I would reach land alive, and I used to pass the time picturing myself safely at home and relating my experiences to my family.

On one of our nights at sea we met a terrible storm. The sea was so rough that our boat seemed likely to overturn at any moment. It rained very heavily too, and a rough shelter was made by spreading a piece of canvas over the boat, and then everyone lay down flat under it. The canvas was pressing hard on my nose and I found it difficult to breathe, but I could at least lick it with my tongue and feel satisfied that a few drops of water, however bitter and dirty, were going down my throat. By six o'clock in the morning the storm had passed and as the sun came up one of the men sighted land—" Land Ho !". " Land Ho ! " Filled with new energy, the men pulled hard on the oars, but could it be yet another false promise? Was it really land or just a cloud? As we drew nearer there was no doubt about it—it was land. At 2 p.m. while we were still quite a distance away from the land, the coal-trimmer who had been lying above me passed away. Prayers were offered for him and then the body was dropped over the side.

The sun was setting when we approached the shore of the island. As we drew nearer, we could make out a lot of figures moving on the shore. They looked like cannibals, but while we were wondering whether we should risk going in, one

of their number came out in a canoe to meet us and motioned us to follow him. He guided our boat until we entered the mouth of a fresh-water stream, so shallow that the water only came up to the knees of the islanders, who now began to crowd round our boat. They were naked except for a piece of cloth below the waist, into which each of them had stuck a big knife. We could not understand a word of what they said, but we showed by signs that we were hungry, whereupon the whole lot of them disappeared, coming back a few minutes later with heaps of cocoanuts. Later we learned that we had landed on Nias Island, 75 miles west of Sumatra.

When we had eaten our fill, one of the natives got into our boat and piloted her up stream. At about eight o'clock, with darkness falling, we tied up to the bank. Here where the jungle came down to the water's edge, the Captain went ashore to contact the police, returning with a number of them four hours later. Three rough stretchers were then improvised and the three of us, who were wounded, were taken away from the boat.

It was midnight when we set off and pitch dark, for there was no electricity on the island, not even torchlight—the islanders, I found out later, burn dried leaves as light. My stretcher was the last and behind it walked in single file the Captain, his boy, the steward and the Chinese carpenter. The journey was not at all comfort-

able, but I managed to doze off now and again and finally woke up to find myself lying on the ground in the middle of a village, still on my stretcher and surrounded by natives. There the three of us lay, plagued almost to death by mosquitoes, for we were smothered in blood from head to foot and the mosquitoes would not leave us. Tea was brought to us in a glass, without milk and sugar, and I tasted plain tea for the first time, finding it so bitter, however, that I could not drink it and had to do without it; until lunch time came when we were given some water and some very welcome rice and chicken. Soon after this I went to sleep again, to be wakened a little later by a woman's sweet voice. It belonged to the Sister in charge of a Mission Hospital in the village of Hilisimithano, twenty-three miles away—and how delighted we were to hear someone speak English. She gave us morphia injections and told the natives where to take us. The last thing I remembered before the morphia took effect was being carried along a narrow path through the jungle.

When I next awoke I was in a bus—yes, a bus—and being driven the twenty-three miles to the hospital. The road was bad and the bus was jolting us badly. The wound near my spine was intensely painful and now that I was wide-awake I felt the pain all the more. I was wondering how much longer I could bear it when, to my relief, the bus stopped and our stretchers were taken into the hospital. Here to my delight

I found more of our crew, none of them badly wounded. The Second and Third Mates were so ill that they had to be kept in separate rooms and I was given a bed in the ward, partitioned off from the rest. What heaven it was to be on a thick mattress, while the Sister and an Indonesian boy cleansed and bandaged my wounds !

That night the rest of the officers arrived, among them Mr. Reddy. I shall never cease to be grateful to him for all that he did for me. He asked the Sister for permission to sleep near me, but for the first three nights there was no sleep for him because I kept him awake the whole time. My condition had become so bad that I could not turn on my side and in my delirium I called out to him every few minutes. Uncomplainingly he would get up and put me in the desired position. Three days later all the officers left the hospital to go to Goonoongsitoli, the chief town on the island. Mr. Reddy tried his best to stay behind to help nurse me, but he was not allowed to do so. However, when he left he promised to let my parents know how I was, and he certainly kept his promise. He returned to India long before me, but as he arrived in Assam by the land route, the army arrested him as an I. N. A. man and sent him to Madras, where he was kept in jail until the war was over. While in jail he still remembered his promise and when his sister visited him he told her to write to my parents and inform them that I had been well when he had last seen me.

Sister Hank Visker, the Sister in charge of the Mission Hospital, worked untiringly for our welfare, doing everything she could to see that we got the best treatment. We were also visited occasionally by a Dutch Mission doctor, Dr. Van Der Plast, from Goonoongsitoli. The Nias nurses, as well as girls, also tried their best to look after us, although unable to understand a word we said, but the Sister's kindness to me extended much further than hospital treatment, as you will read in the coming chapters.

A week after our arrival in Nias, Captain Bird obtained a life-boat which was left on the island by the crew of some other ship that had sunk before us. This boat was better than any of our own five boats.

Then taking with him five officers and the ship's doctor who had volunteered to attempt the crossing of the Indian Ocean in a small boat, he set sail with food and provisions and arrived at Cochin after 32 days.

As soon as he reached Calcutta, he went along to see my father at 9, Gariahat Road. My father was out at the time and the Captain left a message for my father to meet him at the B. I. Officers Club.

Later in the evening my father and uncle Nood-ud-din went along to meet Captain Bird, but this time the latter was out. After they had waited for a couple of hours, however, Captain Bird

arrived and began telling father all about my adventures.

I learnt from my father later on that Captain Bird kept uncle Noor uddin and my father in suspense for a very long time, as he had been speaking of me all along in the past tense. Finally, unable to endure the suspense any longer, my father decided to learn from Captain Bird once and for all the worst that had happened to me. So with the greatest difficulty he asked. "In what condition did you leave him last ? " And to his great relief Captian Bird replied that I had been progressing well in a hospital. He also added that the Sister had told him that I had been eating a lot. "And that," said my father to me later, "assured me that you were, by the grace of God, well." I had a reputation for having a good appetite in the good old days.

And so Captain Bird brought home the first news about me, as he had promised to do when he left me in the Sumatra Hospital.

I wish I had spent many more years in a ship under the command of this Captain.

CHAPTER V

ON THE NIAS ISLAND

In the little garden attached to the village hospital on the hill top I lay on an easy chair. On my left, on a small table, were a couple of books and magazines. I was glancing through one of them when a sweet-looking girl of fourteen appeared before me. She had a glass of lime juice in one hand and a plate of fruit in the other. These she laid on an empty table on my right and then shyly stood aside. "Terimah Kasih," I said, which means 'Thank You' and was all the Malay language I knew at that time; but from the eager way in which I attacked the sliced pineapple and bananas, she could have been in no doubt as to my gratitude. I had stopped looking at the magazine now and as I sipped the lime juice my eyes wandered among the trees, beyond the valleys and the mountain in the distance. My thoughts were with my dear relatives at home. Would I ever see them again? There were no boats here and although the Japanese had not as yet landed, the possibility of an Allied destroyer getting in near enough to take us off the island was so remote as to be inconceivable. We were trapped, trapped without even a chance of escape.

A few days later the news came through that the German prisoners in Goonoongsitoli had been let loose by the Indonesians and had promptly taken over the administration of the island. All the Dutch officials and the officers of our ship had been interned by them, Reddy amongst them, and then sent away to Sumatra. The Indian crew, a little over a hundred men, had remained in Goonoongsitoli in charge of Abdul Rashid, the cargo gunner. With him were Fazlul Rahman, the Chief Steward, and Abdul Karim, the store-keeper.

As once before, when he ran to get bandages for me on the *Chilka*, it was Karim who had taken the initiative. Already he had picked up a few words of the Malayan language, enough to make himself understood by the Indonesian Police and other officials, and he had succeeded in getting jobs for the four 'Succannis', a few 'Khalasis' and the firemen, twenty-five in all, on a steamer tug which plied between this island and Sumatra. These men were still prisoners in German hands, but much better off on the steamer than they might otherwise have been, though the remainder, who stayed in the camp, were exceptionally well treated by the Germans. They got three meals a day and were allowed freedom to go to the bazaar.

A fortnight later the Japanese army arrived. The Commanding Officer of the Japanese Forces gave orders that all the Indians should be shot, but when the Germans explained to them that

they were poor people, most of them illiterate, who had only come out to earn their daily bread, the shooting orders were, thank God, withdrawn. The men were, however, not allowed to go out any more, but fortunately during their brief period of liberty many of them had made friends, who now brought fruit and other things to them in the prison camp and stood chatting outside the barbed wire fence. So far as our men were not made to do any work and most of their time was spent in idling, telling stories and playing indoor games.

But to return to the little hospital on the hill top. The Second and Third Officers were still bed-ridden, but I had started to walk and every evening the Sister took me out to strengthen my limbs. During our conversation she warned me that there was a hard time ahead of me and that I should not start looking forward to happy days in the near future. It was only a matter of time before the Japanese would find us in the hospital, and she wanted me to build up my strength so that I would be able to stand the coming strain. The night before the Japanese doctor came to examine us, she offered to give me an injection which would bring on fever so that the Japs would not take me away from the hospital. I refused it, as I thought that it would make things even more unpleasant for me if the Japanese nevertheless insisted on my going. Also there were a lot of spies around us who would report that they had seen me perfectly fit the previous day.

It was the 22nd April 1942 when the Japanese came. The two English Officers and I were chatting, when the Sister came in with, first of all, the German doctor, Dr. Hyke, who was tall and thin, with blue eyes and curly hair. He said a pleasant 'good morning' as he stepped into our room. He then went on to say that he was a doctor and it made no difference to him whether his patients were Dutch, Japanese, German, Chinese, English or of any other nationality. He assured us that he would do his best. He then examined the three of us individually and decided that I was fit for transport and would therefore be removed from the hospital. He did not, however, give final orders, because he had to wait for the Japanese doctor who was expected at 10 a.m. The rest of the time I lay on my bed and wondered what the Japs would be like. Now and again the Malayan compounder came to me and sympathised with me because I had to leave. "Apa boleh buat ?" he would say, "Toehan punya kuassaan". (What can be done? It is all God's will).

There was something very unusual about the atmosphere of the hospital that morning. In the first place, the hands of the clock seemed to move faster than usual and in the second place, the whole staff—usually so calm and collected and easy-going—was in a turmoil, seething with restless nervous energy. The compounders and the nurses were running hither and thither and forced smiles and worried looks had taken

shape on their serene Indonesian faces ; I had never seen them in such a state before. The Indonesians as a nation had got tired of the Dutch and were eagerly awaiting the arrival of the Japanese army, but, however bad nations may be, there are always individual exceptions and this Dutch Sister was certainly one of them. She was liked not only by the hospital staff but by the whole village, everyone adored her for her affectionate kindness and the hospital staff were afraid that they were going to lose a very good and kind-hearted matron, especially the girls, almost all of them under eighteen and many of them orphans, who looked on her as their own mother. The excitement reached its climax when the Japanese doctor accompanied by four soldiers finally arrived.

Their first job was to inspect the Sister's bungalow. They knocked down all posters and pamphlets put up by the Dutch and one of the soldiers took possession of the Sister's battery radio. Their next object was to examine us ; the doctor came to the door of the room which I shared with the Third Mate, but as he did not seem to wish to speak to us we kept quiet. The soldiers meanwhile were ordered to make a thorough search of the room and when they were through and nothing had been found, the doctor examined the Third Mate and then came towards me. The German doctor had entered in the meantime and was explaining everything to him. The Jap doctor agreed with Dr. Hyke and gave

the final orders for my removal from the hospital to the prison camp at Goonoongsitoli. They then went on to examine the native patients and to look round the hospital. In the meantime I changed into the shirt and trousers which the Sister had given me and packed a tube of toothpaste, a tooth brush and the boric powder which I needed for my burns. Then I went to Mr. Feast, the Second Mate, and chatted with him for the last time.

At midday the Sister came to say it was time for me to go. I shook hands with Mr. Feast, saying "good-bye" and "good luck". I also thanked him for his help and instructions during the time I was with him on the *Chilka*, to which he replied, "Yes, teaching you that submarines were whales." We both burst out laughing and parted merrily. I then said good-bye to Mr. Hodges, the Third Mate, and accompanied the Sister to her bungalow. Here she gave me a five guilder note in case I should need money, and I shook hands with her and thanked her for all her kindness and help.

The Japanese doctor then told me to go with him, and we went down the narrow steps of the bungalow and down the hill with two soldiers in front and two at the back of us. The doctor asked if I was an Englishman, but when I replied that I was an Indian he did not believe me and passed the news to the soldiers. They chuckled

amongst themselves in their lingo. Then the doctor asked me again if my father was an Indian and my mother a European. To this I said, "No," and then he asked me the other way round, that is, if my father was a European and my mother an Indian. I insisted that I was a pure Indian, but they pointed at my grey eyes and my brown hair, not expecting to find an Indian with a fair complexion. Still not believing me, they put me into a car and drove to Taluk Dalam, a small port thirteen miles away.

Taluk Dalam was a little town with a mixed population of Chinese and Malayans. Today it was gaily decorated with Japanese flags and there were school children lining the street to greet the doctor on his return from the interior, all shouting and cheering as we drove past them to the Chinese school, which had been turned over to the army. I was surprised to see the Chinese taking a leading part in entertaining the Japanese soldiers of whom, besides the doctor and his four escorts, there were about a hundred and fifty. Some were having a meal, while others were playing with the children or strolling round the little market.

I was made to sit in the corner of one of the big rooms. One by one the Japanese soldiers would come and ask me " Ingris Ka? " (Are you an Englishman?). When I said, " No, I am an Indian ", they would laugh and point at my grey eyes. None of them could speak proper English. There were a few Malayans there too;

they tried to speak to me, but I could niether understand them, nor they me. It was a schoolboy who finally came to my rescue, an English-speaking Chinese boy. He discovered that I had had nothing to eat all day and brought me some rice and vegetables. At three o'clock Dr. Hyke, the German doctor, arrived with a Dutch missionary, his wife and three children. When he saw me, the first thing he did was ask if I had had anything to eat. He tried also to get me a glass of lemonade, but unfortunately the stock of lemonade had run out.

At about four o'clock we got orders to move. There were four launches waiting to take us and the soldiers off. The Dutch family and myself, with Dr. Hyke, boarded one of them and as I had no luggage to worry about, I quickly found myself a place at the end of the hatch. That night Dr. Hyke sat beside me, chatting for over an hour in an attempt to make me feel at home. He also gave me a glass of Horlick's milk, which was all I had in the way of a meal that night. The next morning the Skipper of the launch, an Indonesian, took me to the crews' quarters and gave me coffee and biscuits. I also had my lunch and dinner with them, the meals consisting of rice and fish curry which I thoroughly enjoyed.

That night, the 23rd of April, at 8 p.m. the four launches anchored at Goonoongsitoli and the soldiers began to disembark. We were the

last to leave our launch and when we got alongside the jetty, we were met on our way up the steps by a German and a Japanese officer. The Japanese officer asked me the question which I had already answered quite a number of times. This officer could speak English, and although I explained to him that I was an Indian, he still would not believe me. At this the German doctor got annoyed and retorted in an angry voice, " I am telling you that he is an Indian." He then caught my hand and pulled me away from the Japanese, saying, " I am taking him to the police station." When we got there he made me stand outside the barracks where our men lived, while he went inside and told Mr. Rashid that unless they agreed to keep me with them, the Japanese would take me to Sumatra and execute me. The crew were only too willing to take me in, and so it happened that instead of being sent to Sumatra where the other officers were too, I found myself still in Goonoongsitoli on the island of Nias—and back in the midst of my own men.

CHAPTER VI

GOONOONGSITOLI AND THE JUNGLE

The next day all the Japanese soldiers and the Germans left the island, leaving Dr. Hyke to look after the administration. He was assisted by the Indonesians, the chief among whom was known as the Demang, with Assistant Demangs at the head of each district. There was also an Indonesian police officer.

The prisoners were kept in the empty military barracks inside the police station compound. The 'Khalasis' and the firemen occupied one block and the saloon crew, Topasses and bazaarmen the other. Rashid and I, together with Rahman and Karim, lived with the saloon crew.

Our day began quite early in the morning as almost all of us said our prayers. At seven o'clock we got two bananas, fried in cocoanut oil, and half a mug of tea without milk and sugar. The men were then taken out to work.

Their work was not very hard. The Indonesian policemen were very kind and the shop-keepers in the bazaar often gave them tobacco or fruit and sometimes even money. Anything, I felt, must

be better than sitting in the barracks all day long doing nothing. I was exempted from work as my wounds had not healed by then, and so my day consisted of going to the hospital every morning to get my wounds dressed. The German doctor saw to it that the Malayan nurses and compounders were good to us, but in spite of being given preference over the natives, I had to spend the best part of three or four hours sitting among the out-patients. At lunch time I returned to camp for a lunch of rice, a piece of fish and a few boiled vegetables; then followed a short nap, after which I would try to learn some Malay. We were not allowed any English books and there were no Urdu books to be had, but Abdul Karim, enterprising as ever, managed to get a Malayan book with English meanings.

As the days went by, the Indonesian police relaxed some of their restrictions and we were allowed to go to the bazaar on our own. Here in the evening, after working hours, we could meet our Indonesian friends and chat with them and forget our worries until sunset. After sunset we had to remain inside the camp, and so we gathered together to sing songs or tell stories. Abdul Rashid used to take the leading part in singing and story telling; he sang very well.

Among our Indonesian friends was a man bearing the name of Marah Sultan. He kept a restaurant and frequently gave us free meals. Marah Sultan

was only one of many kind and hospitable folk who tried their best to make us feel at home. I must admit that God had been exceptionally good to us in sending us to Nias, for in those early days we were a hundred times better off than other prisoners rotting in camps in Sumatra.

We had been in Goonoongsitoli for four months when the unwelcome news came that we were to be sent into the interior, to clear an area of jungle and to plant paddy and maize. We spent a lot of our time discussing this unpleasant prospect, but no amount of talking could prevent the final order being given and the evening of the 21st July, 1942, saw us busy saying good-bye to our friends in Goonoongsitoli. They all sympathised with us, but they too could do nothing. The next morning at seven o'clock we took our gear, a pillow and one or two articles of clothing wrapped up in a mat, on our heads and started marching. We also carried rice and curry wrapped up in banana leaves. To buy this we had each been given fifteen cents on the previous day. The march ahead of us was to be the longest distance I had ever walked in my life and what is more, it had to be done barefoot while I was accustomed to wearing shoes. How I envied the three policemen accompanying us on bicycles !

The road was hard and stony, but we were determined to make the best of things and started walking cheerfully enough. The sun was very

hot and there were no big trees to shade the road, but every three miles or so we came to small villages where we stopped to rest for a while and drink water and where we found the villagers invariably helpful. The further we went into the interior, the fewer people we found who could speak the Malayan language. In the inland villages most people spoke only 'Nias,' which was very difficult. Here too the womenfolk seemed to be very shy, unlike the ones in Goonoongsitoli who walked freely about in the bazaar. Perhaps the sight of strangers frightened them, at any rate they hid themselves if they came across any of our party.

We were glad that the police did not insist on our marching as a column, because walking as we did in batches of four or six, we were better able to keep up one another's spirits. A few preferred to walk on their own, but the majority of us were glad to laugh and tell stories as we went along. If we had not encouraged one another in this way, I am sure we could never have reached our destination. At each village we asked how far we still were from the village where we were to go, and at each village our destination still seemed as far away as ever. One o'clock brought us an hour's rest for lunch, and then, on again. As the day grew on, we began to feel the strain. Not a man amongst us was fit and many of us were still weak from attacks of malaria, but as we had no other alternative we struggled along, growing more

and more weary, until just as the sun was setting we finished the last part of our journey, and found ourselves in a place known as Hilibadalo.

Here two policemen and an Indonesian officer were waiting for us. The officer was an Assistant Demang from Idano Gawo, a village five miles away. Tall, dark and heavily built, with thick curly hair and glasses, he did not strike me as sympathetic, but I must say that my first impression of him was wrong, for he later proved to be very much on our side. I spoke to him in the Malayan language and he told me that we would start work the following day under police supervision. He then went off, as it was growing dark and he had to get back to his own village.

Hilibadalo could scarcely claim to be a village at all; a few empty huts were to be seen here and there, but the encroaching jungle came up to within a few feet of them. Our hut, which had been built as a dormitory, was rectangular in shape with walls and roof of bamboos and leaves. It was a hundred feet long and twenty-five feet wide, with two rows of 'Machans' on either side, spaced at intervals of four feet. These 'Machans', on which we were to sleep, were made of split bamboos rammed together, and when we arrived the mud in the spaces between them was ankle-deep. There was no lights, not even oil lamps, and every minute we had to wave our hands in the air to keep away the mosquitoes which swarmed around us. The

evening we arrived we were too tired to do anything except spread our cane mats and pillows on the Machans, rub our mud-caked feet against the edges of the bamboos and fall asleep.

The next morning we felt a bit better but quickly came up against our first problem, which was sanitation. What were we to do about that? Some of the men who had got up very early had already eased themselves between the trees on the side of the road near the only stream that could supply us with drinking water. However, by laying two logs of wood across a ditch which had very little water in it and which was mostly dry, we were able to construct a reasonably adequate W. C. All the same it was no joke sitting there a good hundred yards inside the jungle with mosquitoes biting us all over the place.

On our first night in Hilibadalo we thought it just about impossible to live there. Indeed one night was enough for the Malayan cook accompanying us. Although he had brought his thick mattress and blanket with him, he made arrangements the very next morning to sleep in a village four miles away, coming to us every morning to cook our breakfast.

This so-called "breakfast" consisted merely of a cup of hot water with tea leaves in it. In the jungle we did not get the fried bananas that we had got in Goonoongsitoli, though at times we managed

to buy bananas from the natives with such little money that we had. Bananas were very cheap in those days ; we could get six of them for only one cent.

The first morning we set to work to clean up the jungle immediately surrounding our camp and to allot places to the men. We also made a place where we could sit in the evening and a place for prayers. The problem of water was the most important. Some villagers told us there was a stream a mile and a half from us, a hundred feet wide and with fast-flowing water, but it was the little stream nearby that had to be used for drinking, although the water was by no means clean. The big stream we used for bathing, gladly walking the mile and a half there for the cool, refreshing splash at the end.

Snakes might have proved another problem for the jungle abounded in them, but fortunately they were absolutely harmless and slunk away if they saw us. One day a snake even crept under a Machan, but not one of us were ever bitten, by snakes, that is, by insects we were bitten to pieces. There were insects of every shape and size, the worst being the scorpions. These lived in the bamboos on the roof and quite a number of our men were badly stung. Among the wild animals the only dangerous ones were the wild boars far in the interior. The natives had told us that these usually retreated still further if they saw a crowd of men, and we did not have to worry about them.

Abdul Karim paid a number of visits to the Assistant Demang asking him to have us removed from Hilibadalo, but as all his efforts were fruitless, we set to and cleaned up the place and made it as habitable as we could. Our work was to clear the jungle and prepare the land for cultivation. The men fell normally into three sections, Deck, Engine Room and Saloon, and so we started by dividing the whole area into three and allotting a part to each section. Immediately after tea in the morning we were out on the job with just a small break for lunch, and then on again until four o'clock. For lunch we had to be content with rice and dry fish burnt in the fire, or a few vegetables with a gravy-like boiled ditch water ; we got our last meal back in camp at 5 p.m.

Our day was long, but the dark hours were even more unwelcome. We had no lamps, so we cut wood from the forest and made fires at three places inside the hut. This gave us a little light and a great deal of smoke, but though we sat there choking and with our eyes watering, the smoke at least kept the mosquitoes away. These wood fires, however, did not last very long and from eight o'clock onwards we had to remain in complete darkness, with no blankets to protect ourselves against the renewed onslaughts of the mosquitoes. It was not surprising that a number of us soon went down with malaria. Dr. Hyke, the German, had provided me quinine tablets to give to those who got an attack of malaria and there was also a village hospital

only four miles from us, which was run by an Indonesian doctor and his wife, who also showed us great kindness.

It became my job to take the sick to the hospital, and the four-mile walk there and back rapidly became a matter of routine to me. Once or twice the doctor came to our camp himself to examine the patients. He was a very practical man, forbidding us, for instance, to keep our scythes under our pillows. Before he gave the order this had been our habit ; but, as he pointed out, if anyone had a nightmare he might easily take out the scythe and kill the person next to him. Nor was the doctor very far wrong either, because the men were a volatile lot and whenever they started scrapping, which they did all too frequently, they would always pick up the nearest thing within reach and throw it. I am sorry to say that in the jungle our men were absolutely out of control ; they would not listen to their officers and said they were not in the ship any more and that there was no further need for them to obey orders. Some of the worst of them managed to get toddy from the sweepers and after an evening's drinking they would kick up a hell of a noise all night. It was a miracle that there were no serious injuries.

The Indonesian police in charge of us did not come to the camp every day and when they did come, they did not throw their weight about or try and drive us beyond our strength. The highlight of our week was the bazaar in Idano Gavo, five

miles to the South of us. Although of course we could not go there, our merchant friends from Goonoongsitoli did, stopping at our camp on the way to give us fruit, money or tobacco and cheering us up in their kindly, typical Malayan way. There was also an Indian, a Punjabi, living in a nearby village and trading in precious stones, but he, I regret to say, was not amongst those who sympathised with us. A big Chinese tobacco merchant, on the other hand, always gave us a lot of tobacco whenever he passed our camp and, more important even than the tobacco, he gave us news. He had a battery radio in his home, and once, I remember, he told us that Burma had been recaptured, that Singapore had fallen to the Allies and that within three months they would all be here to rescue us.

This news, alas, was too good to be true and we did not dare believe him, even though the Assistant Demang of Idano Gavo had also told us much the same thing. But then three Indonesians, who had made their escape after the fall of Sumatra and were now hiding in a village eight miles from us, came to us with the same story. This time, we thought, the news really must be true, and I got so excited that I longed to let the Sister in the Mission Hospital know about it too. The Sister, I am glad to say, had not been interned, as we had all feared, but had continued in charge of the Mission Hospital at Hilisimatro. But now I wondered if I could contact her.

A few days later as if in answer to a prayer one of the Sister's assistants, passing through Hilibadalo on his way to Goonoongsitoli, dropped in to see me. I asked him to drop again in the camp on his way back. In the meantime I had written two letters, one to the Sister and other one to the Third Officer, which were duly picked up and delivered. A week later he was back again, this time carrying not only a reply but a small parcel as well. The parcel contained a face towel, a cake of scented soap and a few tomato seeds. Inside the envelope, besides letters from the Sister and the Third Officer, there were twenty-five guilders in cash. I was dumbfounded and tears started into my eyes as I stood there trying to thank God for having mercy on us, and the Sister through whom God's mercy had descended. How could she have known that three or four of us were sharing one filthy piece of cloth to dry ourselves ? How could she have known how welcome that clean smelling cake of soap could be ? I kept smelling the scent of the soap, and each time I thought of Sister Hank Visker who had been so wonderfully kind. Yet in my reply to her, I did not know how to put on paper just what it meant to me; the proper words to thank her refused to come, indeed no words could express the overwhelming gratitude that I felt. There in the jungle things were so cheap that twenty-five guilders were more like two thousand five hundred. Why I could even afford to buy myself a few clothes to replace the sorry rags that my own had, by this time, become—so my

mind ran on spending my fortune. But to keep the money to myself would, I felt, be unfair to the others and so I handed it all over to Rahman, the oldest man amongst us, and told him to divide it equally amongst the lot of us. Each man even then got 30 cents, a small fortune to people with no money at all.

The days that followed were full of joy and excitement. Everyone talked of the return of the Allies and what they would do when they boarded the ship that was to take them home. Some thought wistfully of smoking a cigarette, others were for a good cup of tea with milk and sugar. The 'Khalasis' and the firemen counted the days that they had been away from home and totted up how much money they would get on their return.

That month, September, 1942, we lived in a false paradise, but although the news later was found to be utterly untrue, that brief respite from despair had given us all a new lease of life. Towards the end of the month we had a visit from the Sister. One evening while I was saying my prayers, I heard a car stop outside the camp and then the sweet voice of Sister Hank Visker. She was accompanied by an Indonesian police officer and was going to Goonoongsitoli to nurse Dr. Hyke who was very seriously ill. The Indonesian officer had been kind enough to allow her to call in on us on her way.

A couple of days later we were to hear that Dr. Hyke had passed away. This news was a great shock for us, because he had done everything he could to help us. It was because of his influence that the Malayans connected with the village hospital near Hilibadalo were being so good to us and it was of course he who had prevented the Japanese from shooting me.

I was out at work cutting the trees when I heard the drone of a motor-cycle. What could it mean ? Imagine my surprise when the person who got off it turned out to be Sister Hank Visker. I rushed up to her, just as I was, in my dirty, muddy clothes and took her inside the 'cow-shed,' as we called the hut. I told all the other men to keep on working and not to crowd round us in case she was discovered. There were three or four sick men lying on their Machans, and the Indonesian cook came up and stood near us for a while, but as he couldn't understand a word of what we said, he soon stopped being curious and went back to his work.

The Sister then told me all about Dr. Hyke's illness and how not only she but the whole island had lost a sincere helper in his death. She had been asked to take charge of the Goonoongsitoli Hospital in his place, but did not like to leave the two English officers who were still lying very ill in the village hospital. Then, as gently as she could, she told me that the good news I had given

her in my letter was all wrong and that I should trust no one that came to the camp. She had heard from a reliable Chinaman that the Allies were not doing well and that the future looked very black indeed for the Allies. The war, she thought, would last at least another three years.

This news that the Sister had given me was most depressing. For a whole month we had lived on the hope that in a few months' time we would be out of the jungle and on our way home. But three years! The mere thought of it made us shiver. How many of us, we wondered, would ever see home again? How many of us would even survive? So after Sister Hank Visker had left us, there was no more talk of the future, no more planning, nothing to look forward to. A marked change had come over the faces and all the joy had gone from them. We did our work, and we prayed to God Almighty to have mercy on us and to deliver us from the evil into which we had fallen.

A couple of weeks passed and I did not hear again from the Sister, until one evening her driver brought me a letter. The letter was very long, and in it she told me that the Japanese were thinking of arresting all white men and women who were still free. She was thinking of making her escape and asked me if I would like to join her. The driver in fact was on his way to the coast to buy a boat for that purpose. For the next three days I could think of nothing else; should I have a

shot at escaping and possibly lose my life in the process? Or should I stick it out at Hilibadalo with the men? Anything seemed better than staying in the jungle. The crowd of men who were with me had begun to get on my nerves and yet, ungrateful as they were, I still did not like the idea of leaving them in the lurch. I discussed the Sister's letter with Rashid, with whom I had become very friendly, and in the end I decided for once to be selfish. Abdul Rashid said he would come with me too, and so I wrote to the Sister, through her driver, giving her my ideas on how our escape might be effected.

I don't remember the exact date, but it must have been early in October that the driver took away that letter. During the days that followed, while we were waiting for a reply, the behaviour of Mr. Rashid made me very anxious. He was a big man, muscular and well-proportioned, and with a big self-confident voice, but he now showed himself to be very faint-hearted. This man, who had been wont to delight us with his songs and his stories and his swaggering conversation, was now too terrified even to speak, his big eyes bulged with fear and he devoted most of his time to saying his prayers. Again and again I wondered why he had asked to go with me and felt that his behaviour was so strange that it was bound to give the whole show away. Bitterly I regretted giving the Sister his name; but now it was too late, and all I could do was to keep quiet and hope for the best.

A week later, while we were chatting outside our hut one evening, we heard a motor-cycle in the distance. Could this be the news we were waiting for? But no, it was the Assistant Demang. He stopped by the side of the road opposite to the entrance of our hut and called me over to him. Then we walked away from the rest of the men and sat down on a rock. He asked me straight out if I had been corresponding with the Sister and I, as frankly, admitted it. Just as well, for he said that the letter had come into his possession; he went on to say, however, that as his sympathies were with the Allies, he had not reported it to the Japs. I then made sure that he would not take steps against the Sister and was very much relieved to learn that he had burned the letter without showing it to anyone. If the Assistant Demang had not been on our side, we would all have been shot dead. I prayed to God and thanked Him for saving me yet again. As for Sister Hank Visker, she was taken two weeks later with the English officers to Sumatra. Since then I have not heard any news of her, and although it is now ten years since she first helped me, I am still trying to get in touch with her.

The Second Mate, Mr. Feast, died in hospital in Sumatra in March 1943 and the Third Mate, Mr. Hodges, lost his life while he was being transferred to Singapore in a prison ship which was sunk by an Allied submarine.

May their souls rest in peace !

CHAPTER VII

STEAM TUG AND FIRST VISIT TO SUMATRA—MEN BROUGHT OVER TO THE ISLAND

By the end of October a large area of the land had been cleaned and got ready for cultivation. Then seeds came, brought by an expert who showed us how to plant them. But when this had been done, our work was by no means finished. We now had to start cutting away the remaining portion of the jungle. By this time too many of the prisoners had gone sick and as the days passed, the number of sick men increased. I was among those who became so ill that they could not walk on their own—at one time only seven of our men were fit to move about. Then on the 9th of November one of our comrades, the pantry man, passed away.

This death, the first since we came to Hilibadalo, had a very bad effect on the morale of everyone, and I must admit that I myself began to feel convinced that I was dying. I even went so far as to hand over my wrist watch to Rashid, with instructions to give it to my mother on his return home. I also begged him not just to throw me anywhere in the jungle, but to bury me properly. Fortunately for me my friends refused

to admit the possibility of my dying and together they kept up my spirits, at one moment exhorting me to have faith in Allah and the next reprimanding me for giving up hope so easily. A couple of days later I was removed to the village hospital along with nine others, Mr. Karim being still with me. This change of atmosphere certainly did me good, for my condition at once improved and I began to feel that, after all, I was going to live. The Assistant Demang came to the hospital one day and we told him that he must do something about us : we simply could not go on living in this jungle. He promised that he would do his best and went away to Goonoongsitoli to make representations on our behalf. In the meantime all of us had returned to the camp except two, who were very seriously ill.

On the evening of the 16th November 1942 the Assistant Demang returned to Hilibadalo with the news that we were to go back to Goonoongsitoli. He regretted, he said, that he had not been able to arrange a bus for us, adding that we should have to make our own way back.

Walk back or crawl back, the mere idea of leaving the jungle was so welcome that we were prepared to leave at once. The Assistant Demang told us that no food would be cooked for us on the way, but he gave us money to buy food to last us for the next two days. Old Rahman was too ill to walk, we decided, so we put him in the bullock cart that was to carry our pots and pans and other cooking utensils.

Early next morning, on the 17th of November, we started on our march back. Weak as we were, the thought of returning to Goonoongsitoli gave us new strength and energy so that even the most feeble amongst us managed to stay the course. There was old Ramzan, for instance, sixty-three years of age. Like Rahman, the old Steward, he had sailed the seven seas and been in many tight corners in his time, but this march from Hilibadalo to Goonoongsitoli was the worst experience of his life. Watching him struggle along with his bundle on his old bowed shoulders, I felt so sorry for him that I offered to carry his bundle as well as my own. My own I then carried on my head.

That first day more than half the men stopped half way at a village, arriving in Goonoongsitoli late the next day. But I, and a few others, reached Goonoongsitoli the same evening. We had only one thought, to get out of the jungle as fast as our legs would take us. As we neared the town, our flagging steps quickened and we got more and more cheerful. Two saloon boys, Tarmuz Ali and Jamal, walked along beside me at top speed, chatting and cracking jokes. We reminded ourselves that the jungle had made us "Junglis" and now that we were getting back to town, we must become civilised again. In the jungle we had always worn our Sarongs above our knees because that was the most comfortable way for walking, but this method, we now

decided, was not suitable for life in town, and we adjusted them accordingly. When, at sunset, we arrived in Goonoongsitoli we were wearing our Sarongs most correctly.

Then we made straight for the police barracks, where we had lived before, and where the wife of one of the policemen thoughtfully provided us with several cakes of soap. Feeling almost free again, we bathed and then went on to dine—free of course—at Marah Sutan's eating house. What a change it was from rice and dried fish !

The next day Abdul Karim went to the Demang, who told him that he had given no orders of any kind for us to return and that we had no business to have left the jungle. Karim said that the Assistant Demang had given us money and told us to go back to Goonoongsitoli. The Demang then got very angry and a heated argument followed. Finally the Demang told Karim to return to the barracks, promising to come there himself in the afternoon.

The Demang accompanied by two policemen arrived at two o'clock. " You were sent ", he said, " to the jungle where you could grow your own food and live as free men. But it seems that this is not what you want. Of your own free will you have come back to live like prisoners here. No one could sympathise with your plight more than I do; but here, in Goonoongsitoli, you are no

longer my responsibility. I cannot give you any food or any money, or any work to earn food and money. It will be far better then, surely, for you to return to the jungle and your freedom."

Even the biggest fool could not fail to realise the insincerity of his speech. Did he really think that we would believe he was "helping" us by letting us stay in the mosquito-ridden swamps of Hilibadalo where even the natives of the island could not survive. We had known this man, or rather this mass of inhuman flesh, from the time we landed on Nias Island and we were well aware of his real attitude towards us. Man? He was a mere puppet, a lump of quaking jelly, as soon as a Japanese came near. It was he who once, on a visit to us in the jungle, had told us that he would have to consult the Japs before he could authorise us to get an oil lamp. Four months had passed and we never got that lamp. And now he was asking us to believe that he wanted, most sincerely, to help us. One of us suggested that since he couldn't look after us himself, he might send us across to Sumatra where at least we could earn our living; but he replied that the Japanese did not want us there. No, there was nothing to it; either we should go back to the jungle or we must earn our living in Goonoongsitoli. How in the world, we wanted to know, could seventy of us find employment in a small town which had for a bazaar only a few fruit shops, five tea shops and a couple of eating houses. That, he said,

was nothing to do with him, this was our problem. After a lot of argument he was persuaded to allow us food for another six weeks, but on a reduced ration, so we were now to get less to eat than at any time since the *Chilka* sank. " And", he added, " after January 1943 you will get no more, nothing at all."

Rahman began to comfort us. He was a very pious old man and he begged us not to worry. " No human being " he said, " has the power to stop another human being's food ". As long as we were willing to work, he believed, God would see to it that we had something to eat.

All the same our hearts sank and in the days that followed ; with the food becoming rapidly worse and worse, we lost all the buoyancy of spirit that had carried us out of the jungle. Then one day the taste of salt disappeared completely from vegetables and gravy and many of the prisoners became so ill that they had to be admitted to hospital. One thing alone sustained us as we swept the roads and cut the grass and did all kinds of manual labour; at least the Demang had not forced us to return to Hilibadalo.

The 25th of November 1942 remains clear in my memory. That morning, while we were waiting for our morning tea, some men sighted the smoke of a steam tug on the horizon. Our camp, by the way, was right on the coast and this was the first time the tug had visited Goonoong-

sitoli since our return from the jungle. The relations of the Khalasis and firemen on board got very excited when they saw the steamer, as the end of a trip had always meant extra food for them in the past and money and sometimes even new clothing. And for those of us who were less fortunate there was still the pleasure of meeting our men and hearing from them what went on in Sumatra and in the world outside Nias.

At midday the tug and the barge which she towed anchored in the open harbour. A couple of hours later the crew of the vessel were back in the camp visiting us. One of the Succanis told me that he had heard a rumour that I would have to go with them on the next trip. I could tell by the way he said it that he was not at all pleased with the idea of having an officer back with him and I for my part had no desire whatever to go on the tug. But then I began to think it over. Supposing the rumour were true, what decision ought I to make? If I went on the tug, perhaps I would not only earn some money but might just possibly be able to get help for the men left at Goonoongsitoli, from the authorities in Sumatra. I talked it over with Rahman, who agreed with me and so, a little later, when a young Chinaman came to the camp and asked for me, I was ready to accept any proposal he might put forward.

This young man was Chia Sin Lok, a nephew of Mr. Ang Boon Hak, the Chinaman who owned the tug. Lok asked me if I knew anything about

navigation and, when I said that I did, invited me to go with them. The Demang gave me permission to go, and I boarded the tug the same evening, wearing a pair of trousers, a pullover and a pair of shoes that Lok had given me.

The *Dufferin* of course had taught me such navigation and seamanship as was needed, but all the same my practical experience at sea had been very short indeed and in the last eight months of misery I had forgotten many of the things I had once known. So when I went aboard, I did not attempt to throw my weight about but treated the Succanis, all old men, with the respect and deference due to their age. I also explained to them that my sole reason for joining the tug was to get to Sumatra, where I hoped to secure better conditions for all the men at Goonoongsitoli.

The steam tug was fifty feet long and about fifteen feet wide and weighed about 300 tons. She towed a big barge, which carried a mixed cargo of cocoanut oil, rice and pigs from the smaller islands to the main land of Sumatra. Cement and other general goods were then brought back in her from Sumatra. Mr. Ang Boon Hak and his nephew Lok always accompanied the barge, and there were also three other clerks. One of the clerks was a Malayan Christian, the other a Chinaman and the third a Minado. The Minado, who is going to play a very important part in this chronicles, was called Suak. He came from

Celebes island and had been in the Dutch Air Force until his plane had been shot down over Sumatra. Here he had been interned for a time, but he had managed to escape and Mr. Ang Boon Hak had then come to his rescue, and he was now working as a clerk on the tug. Suak could speak English and so could the two other clerks, and Lok and I became very friendly with all of them.

The tug left Goonoongsitoli the same night and after calling at a village port on the same island, and then at another port on the island of Pulo Telo, we sailed across to Padang, the western port of Sumatra.

Padang has a fine harbour and can berth three ships at a time in her jetties. Before entering the harbour we had to wait for the pilot, a Dutchman called Rolf, who after twenty-three days' internment, had been released to go on with his work. At first he was very reserved towards me, but after making certain that I was an Indian and that I would not betray him, he began to talk more freely, becoming in the end quite pally with me and visiting me on the tug whenever he could find the time.

The first night in Padang Lok took me ashore to buy me some clothes. Hari Bros. & Co., the shop where we went, was owned by a Punjabi. The proprietor was not there, but his assistant, Mr. Narayan Singh, gave me a very warm welcome

and refused to let Lok pay for the two pairs of shorts and the shirts which he wanted to buy for me. That night I stayed in Lok's house in China town.

A couple of days later feeling homesick for India, I went back to see Mr. Narayan Singh and while I was talking to him, a well-dressed man came in and spoke to him in English. On being introduced to him I found that he was Mr. M. Jilani, one of the leading Indians in the town. Mr. Jilani was an optician and he owned a large spectacles shop at the corner of the Big Bazaar. Here he lived with his family in three rooms adjoining the shops and at Mr. Singh's request he took me home with him for a meal.

When we arrived at his shop he ordered ice-cream. Just imagine it, ice-cream, my favourite dish, after all these months ! He asked me about my experiences, and then I told him that a lot of our men were stranded at Goonoongsitoli and asked his advice. They could, he was sure, find plenty of employment in Padang, but the difficulty would be how to get them across. The best thing to do, he decided, would be for me to write to the head of the Indian community in Medan, the capital of Sumatra, and ask him for help. So together we sent off a wire to him. I don't know whether or not he ever received my wire, but we certainly never got any reply from Medan.

Padang proper is a beautiful town, built ten miles inland from Emma Haven, which is the dock area. It has got a rich and cosmopolitan population and its tarred roads and concrete houses were, I noticed, kept very clean. I met quite a lot of Indians there, mainly from the South of India, many of them descended from those early traders who had been among the first people ever to sail to the East. Most of them today are, like their forbears, still cloth merchants and traders. To the local people they are known as 'Klings' and they have a colony of their own which is known as 'Kampoong Kling'. Perhaps the kindest of them all—and they were all exceptionally kind—was Abdulla Abdul Rehman, the owner of a very big store. Abdul Rehman gave me a lot of good advice. "The people of Sumatra," he said, "are very treacherous, especially the women. If a girl makes up her mind that she wants to marry you, you will find it very difficult to get out of her clutches." He also told me to be very careful before I ate anything in the house of a Malayan, especially if there was a girl in the house.

In Padang, I discovered, there were far more women than men. Most of them were Muslims, but unlike their sisters in India the Malayan women do not observe 'purdah' and go about the bazaar quite freely doing their shopping. Most of the shops in the bazaar had saleswomen and almost all the offices had women clerks—education being

compulsory for boys and girls alike. Most of the young girls rode bicycles, too, and took an active part in games.

Of the foreign population the Chinese were in the majority ; most of them were Christians and many of them owned big firms. Among the Indians, besides the "Klings" or South Indians already mentioned, there are a lot of Sindhis and Punjabis, all very rich merchants with big shops. At that time there were also quite a lot of Germans in Padang, easily identifiable because of the arm band with the Swastika on it which they were obliged to wear, and I also saw a number of Swiss.

For the few days that I had so far spent in Padang I had been so free and easy that I was beginning to forget that there was a war on and to feel that I was just an ordinary civilian again. Later on I discovered that I had better not be too free and easy, because I was being watched by Indonesian spies all the time.

Mr. Abdulla Abdul Rehman went to Singapore on business but his assistant manager, Mr. Esmail, took a liking to me and gave me an open invitation to visit his shop whenever I came to town. I had some delicious food with him. I also spent quite a lot of my time with Mr. Jilani, the optician. He was a very sensible man with a wide knowledge of the world. I learned that although he had been born in Sumatra and had

spent all his boyhood there, he had also lived in India and Africa and, for eleven years, in America. His advice to me was to stay out of the hands of the Japanese and to settle down in Padang. If only my complexion had not been so fair he would have risked sending me to another friend of his in the interior. There, he said, the Japs would never have been able to trace me, but as things were, perhaps the most practical way out would be for me to marry an Indonesian girl. Indonesian girls, as my other friend Mr. Abdul Rahman had told me, were easy enough to get, but my conscience would not allow me to do such a thing at that time. Moreover, I was very young, only nineteen, and still hoped to get married at home when I returned there.

Over a week passed and still there was no news from Medan about our men in Goonoongsitoli. At times, when I was enjoying myself, I felt almost guilty, although I knew that I was doing everything I could.

In the last week of December 1943 we left Padang with a full load of cement, calling in again, on our way back, at Pulo Telo and Goonoongsitoli. Here I met my comrades and told them everything I was doing, assuring them that I would not rest until I had secured better conditions for them. I also distributed some money among the saloon crew, who were never given anything by the Khalasis and the firemen. From Goonoongsitoli

we went to Sibolga, a small port on the North-West coast of Sumatra. Mr. Ang Boon Hak had his home at Sibolga and the tug, so the clerks told me, usually stayed there for a long time.

At the first opportunity Suak took me ashore and we went to the house of an Indian baker. In a foreign land one usually longs to meet one's countrymen, and I was delighted to find an old man sitting on a bench in front of the bakery, puffing away at a Hookah. Suak and I greeted him and sat down on a chair in front of him. He said he had heard of me from the Khalasis and was pleased to meet me ; but he seemed to be very quiet and hardly spoke a word. At first I thought he was one of those quiet, reserved men who find it difficult to talk to strangers, but later on I discovered that far from being reserved, this old gentleman, whose name was Mr. Jalil, was usually the life and soul of a party. But the day I first met him Mr. Jalil—or Khan Sahib as his friends usually called him—had a bad attack of toothache and so instead of pulling my leg, as he was to do many times in the future, he was content to let me sit quietly.

It was here in the pleasant shade of the trees and with the good smell of new-made bread reaching me in whiffs each time the oven doors were opened that I met the man who was to do more for me than anyone else. This was Mr. Khaleel, the owner of the bakery. Mr. Khaleel came into his garden, saw me and immediately

asked me if I had eaten any food. Finding that I had not, he at once told his wife to prepare food for me. Meanwhile a clean shirt and trousers of his were brought to me to put on, while my own dirty ones were sent to the Dhobi. Next day he refused to take the clothes he had given me back again; in fact he gave me some more.

While the tug was in Sibolga I visited him every evening in his house. I found there real peace—away from the noisy, brawling atmosphere of the tug.

A few days later the Japanese Military Police summoned me to their office. Mr. Khaleel took me there himself and introduced me to the Jap officer as his friend. The Japanese officer did not know any English, so he had an interpreter to translate to him all that I said. He asked me a number of questions and seemed satisfied that I was not a spy. I behaved very politely and when he had finished questioning me, I felt that the interview had gone so well that I could risk telling him about the remainder of our crew who were still on the Nias Island and about how the Demang intended stopping their food from January 1943. He listened sympathetically and gave me the name and address of the officer in charge at Nias, telling me to go and see him; but before the tug reached Goonoongsitoli, orders had already been given for the men to be brought to Sibolga. This glad

news reached me on the 1st January 1943, and by the 17th of February the whole of our crew (except one Chinese carpenter who had decided to settle on Nias Island amongst his own countrymen) had arrived in Sibolga. They had had enough of Nias and the transfer was welcomed by all of them.

CHAPTER VIII

SIBOLGA, PADANG—AND INTERNMENT

Sibolga is a little seaport on the western coast of Sumatra and the capital of the province of Tapanuli. This province is known as Batakland and its inhabitants are called Bataks. They speak a lingo of their own, although most of them know the Malayan language and both the men and the women have very hoarse voices. Their features too are very rough, and not so long ago some of the inhabitants of this province were man-eaters. Nowadays, however, three quarters of the population are Christians and the rest Muslims and Chinese, but they are still so primitive that they do not know how to milk a cow, and so have never had the good fortune to taste fresh milk.

The harbour of Sibolga is a natural one, surrounded by hills on three sides. It has a small jetty where very small steamers can berth, but the larger ocean-going vessels anchor in the stream and discharge their cargo into barges, which are then towed by steam launches. There is no railway, the chief means of transport into the interior being motor buses which run to all the big towns of Sumatra.

American and British films have had a very great influence on the population of Sumatra and although I never heard a Batak actually singing in English, his own songs were almost always sung to English and American tunes. With the Japanese occupation these disappeared, to be replaced by Japanese tunes.

The houses at Batak are small and built of wood, but even the poorest of them always have a couple of chairs and a table in the front room, for the people are very fond of "interior decoration". Most of the Bataks are poor and, at the time of my arrival, such trade as there might be was in the hands of the Chinese. Japanese occupation changed all that. Indeed the Japanese made a great deal of propaganda out of the vast differences between the rich and the poor and declared their intention of redistributing the wealth of the province; but it was mere propaganda unless the fact that all the trade became a Japanese monopoly can count as redistribution. The money the Japs made went back to Tokyo by the ton, while the Bataks remained poor.

At the beginning of the war when the Japs were bombarding Sumatra, a number of the Chinese left the port and went to live in huts made of bamboo and leaves, near their graveyard about a mile and a half out. I must say the situation struck me as very practical, cutting out, as it did, the need for funeral processions. When our men

were brought from Sibolga, it was these huts, which were now empty, that were turned over to them for their camp.

The place was not unpleasant and in spite of its being surrounded by barbed wire, it did not have the gloomy appearance of the usual prison camp. The guards who kept watch over the men were Indonesians and fairly easy-going. They escorted them to work every morning and evening, and as this march led them through the town, it gave them at least a glimpse of civilisation and a feeling of not being entirely cut off from the world outside. Most important of all, the food was adequate—rice and vegetable curry—and on top of that each man was given 30 cents in cash, which was enough to buy tobacco. For a few days the cooking was done by the men in turns, but later on, when groups of them had managed to buy small pots, the communal cooking stopped and the whole of the backyard was turned into a kitchen. Each party took their share of rice and vegetables, and the food was cooked early in the morning by certain old men among the crew who were excused from heavier kinds of work. These older prisoners were also responsible for keeping the camp clean. There was no shortage of water here and the men could bathe at any time of the day as there was a bath-house only a hundred yards from the camp.

I have said 'bath-house' instead of 'bathroom,' because these are a special feature of the place. Fast flowing water coming down the hills is led

through pipes to houses situated at intervals of a quarter of a mile. These houses, which are made of stone, have two compartments, one for men and the other for women, and everyone living near uses them for bathing and washing clothes. The Bataks also carry water back to their homes for cooking and drinking, strapping long wooden flasks on their backs for the purpose. Naturally a lot of cottages had grown up near the bath-houses and the people going daily to and fro added to the gaiety of our camp.

Every morning as the sun rose above the eastern hills, birds sang cheerfully from the surrounding trees. Little children ran along the pathway on the outskirts of the camp shouting the Japanese war-cry. Grown-up girls with flowing hair and attractive features glided past the camp to fetch water from the bath-house in the bamboo flasks that hung down on either side from their shoulders. The women were followed by men, who usually liked to take a bath before going to work. Later on the older women and the children would come along the path to go for a bath or to wash clothes. There was life going on all round 'Santiong' (the name of the camp), and there is no doubt that the men felt the better for it.

In charge of our men at Santiong was Abdul Karim, that same enterprising store-keeper of the *Chilka* who had already done so much for us all. Abdul Karim is what is usually called in books,

"a character". He came from a respectable family in Bengal and had gone to the Muslim University School at Aligarh, but while he was in the matriculation class the call of adventure had made him leave his studies, and he joined a shipping company in the saloon department. During the first three years of the European war he served in western waters, taking part in the evacuation of Dunkirk—to say nothing of numerous "incidents" while moving up and down the English Channel. In October, 1941, he signed off at Calcutta to settle down, intending never to return to the sea again. But 'Man proposes and God disposes'. On the 11th of March, 1942, Karim found himself on a lifeboat with the surviving crew of the ill-fated *Chilka*. He was the first amongst us to learn the Malayan Language—I got my first lessons in the Language from him—and later on he learnt a good bit of Japanese also. In Sibolga his work was to go to the office and get the daily allowance for the men, but he did not rest content with that; he was always fighting for their rights and perhaps his greatest triumph was when he succeeded in getting a Loongyi and a new shirt for each man. I can see him now, talking animatedly to some official and moving his hands about in his excitement, his rather flat features lit up by the sincerity of his arguments. Yes, Abdul Karim was a very fine man and one I am proud to have known.

I stayed in Sibolga until April 1943 and while I was there I paid frequent visits to the camp to

enquire how the men were getting on. A good part of my time was also spent in Mr. Khaleel's house. I have mentioned before that this gentleman helped me with clothes, money and food ; as a matter of fact he did so much for me that I do not know how I can ever repay him. Mr. Khaleel hailed from Azamgarh in the United Provinces and was tall and had a dark complexion. Though he was not educated in the academic sense of the word, he was doing well in business. He was, on the whole, a very undemonstrative man, but for all that a man of deep feelings, and always ready to do a good turn. Not only I but all my colleagues owe him a great debt of gratitude for the way he helped us when everyone else gave us the cold shoulder. Whenever a Jap officer went to his house they always enquired about me, as they still suspected me of being a European. On occasions they even accused him of helping the enemy, but this gallant gentleman never for one moment changed his attitude towards me. Later on when the Japs were following my movements very carefully, he did ask me not to visit him for a while but he continued to send me what I needed through someone else.

Having brought all the men to Sibolga, my chief object in joining the tug, I now asked the Chinese manager to let me go back to Santiong with the rest of my colleagues, but he would not hear of it. Suak and I then discussed the possibility of making off with the tug, but we had to admi

that it was impossible. Our only hope lay in meeting an Allied submarine, and there was just a faint chance that one might come in near to Sumatra.

I went back to Padang at the end of April, where a severe pain in my right arm, where I had been wounded, became so bad that the Indonesian doctor there said it would have to be operated on. Mr. Ang Boon Hak wanted me to go back to Sibolga, but I was in such agony that I begged to have it done at Padang. So the tug sailed without me, leaving me with a letter, signed by a Japanese officer of the shipping department, saying that I was permitted to stay in Padang to undergo treatment; unfortunately, however, no proper arrangements had been made for my admission to hosiptal.

Roll, the Dutch Pilot whom I have mentioned before, would have liked to have given me board and lodging, but he had a wife and two kids to think about and could not risk antagonising the Japanese. He was still under strict observation and allowed to go to the town on certain days only, while his wife and child never came out of the bungalow. Although he was paid very poorly, he offered to give me money any time I needed it; and if there were no policemen around, he used to chat with me and give me tea in the little tea shop near the jetties. It was to the tea shop we went as soon as the tug had sailed. Roll put my bundle

of clothes on his bicycle-carrier and as we walked along further, we sang " Show Me The Way To Go Home " very softly.

I was in great pain from my arm and desperately anxious to get into hospital. Of all the Indians in Padang that I knew I thought that Mr. Jilani the optician could probably help me most, and so I went to his place. It was, I now realise, very selfish of me, but when a man is in peril he is so worried about himself that he does not always think of the man from whom he is seeking help. On this occasion I certainly chose the right man. That same evening Mr. Jilani took me to the hospital, where, through his influence, the Indonesian doctor attended to me carefully and also softened the attitude of the Japanese doctor. After a couple of days the minor operation needed to put me out of my intense pain was performed and I was told to go to the hospital everyday to get my wound dressed. During this period I slept on the ground in the front room of Mr. Jilani's shop and had all my meals with him. Very soon I got friendly with his children who were all very small, and I often whiled away the time playing with them. Mrs. Jilani and her mother, an old woman, were also very good to me, treating me as one of their own children.

In return for all their kindness I tried, when my wound had healed, to make myself useful. Every morning I swept and cleaned the shop, open-

ing it long before Mr. Jilani got up. This shop, besides having optical goods, also stocked bottles of scent and other toilet articles which I sometimes even sold if Mr. Jilani was not there. He also taught me to fix spectacle frames and said that in time he would teach me to become a genuine optician. All the time I was with him I felt quite safe and happy—and thanks to the mercy of the Lord Almighty no harm came to my protector either. For some reason or other the police did not worry about me at all, although I still had to be very careful in the streets and indeed I went out of doors very seldom. I used, however, to help Mrs. Jilani by standing in the queue for the family sugar.

I had already found Mr. Jilani's advice most valuable. To add to the pleasure of his company now came that of meeting his brother, Murad, a very good Arabic scholar who had spent some years in Turkey. In a way my meeting with Murad was a turning point in my life, for he gave me an Urdu book from which I learnt a great deal about religion.

At this time, when I was still toying with the idea of settling in Padang, Narayan Singh of Hari Bros. made me a sincere offer of employment. He also sent me a hundred guilders when I was badly in need of some money. That was a wonderful surprise for me, as I had never asked him, or anybody else, to give me money. While writing about my benefactors, I must not forget

Nasir, the well known 'Ice-cream Wala'. He made the best ice-cream in Padang and every Malayan that ever spoke of ice-cream always praised him. I used to visit him fairly often—I love ice-cream—, but when I found that he would never accept payment I had to cut down my visits.

How pleasant too were those Padang evenings. Riding Mr. Jilani's bicycle, I used to roam all over the place, sometimes accompanied by one of his little children. I remember one evening, when I was riding with young Zainab, aged three, on the bar of the bicycle, a passer-by pointed out to me that the child was fast asleep. Thank heaven I had been told, otherwise little Zainab might have fallen off the bar.

Emma Haven, the port of Padang, was ten miles from the town. Once I cycled there and met Mr. Roll the pilot, who was delighted to see me. I gave him all the news of the town and told him how Mr. Jilani was helping me, and then he took me to the pictures. There were two picture-houses in Padang where occasionally Indian pictures were shown. Although they did not understand a word of the dialogue, the Indonesians were very fond of these pictures. They liked Indian music, the dresses and the scenery and crowded to see them, and whenever I went to the pictures, I would be sure to have to explain the whole story to the people sitting next to me.

When I had been with Mr. Jilani for about three weeks, another young man came to him and asked for shelter. He said that he had been to other people, but had found no one willing to help. Mr. Jilani was not a very rich man, though he earned enough as an optician to live on, but he was very good-hearted and could never say " No " to anyone who came to his door for help, and so this young man was also taken in. He was called Alijan. He had been in the R.I.A.S.C. until the fall of Singapore. After that he had managed to escape, ultimately finding his way to Sumatra.

Alijan and I quickly became good friends. He had a cheeky sense of humour and was always ready for a lark, especially with the girls. Often when we were seated in Mr. Jilani's shop, or sometimes even while we were walking in the bazaar, if a girl stopped and stared at me he would make faces at her and say, " Apa Mao, ini binatang ka ? " (What do you want, is he an animal ?), and the poor girl, who was probably only wondering why a white man was allowed to go about freely without wearing a badge identifying him as a German or a Eurasian, would feel embarrassed, blush and hastily go away. The more forward amongst the girls would answer him back and joke with him before turning away. Later on Alijan made ice-cream and sold it in the bazaar, and in return for helping him I used to get some ice-cream free of charge. Later on he joined a travelling repertory company, and I for one sadly missed his cheerful companionship.

One afternoon in the first week of July, a Malabari, called Mr. Ayar, came to Mr. Jilani and asked for me. This Mr. Ayar was a member of the Japanese propaganda department, fairly well educated and speaking good English. He said that a speech had been made for Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose to broadcast from Singapore in Urdu and he had been told by the Japs to listen to the broadcast and translate it for them, but as he did not understand Urdu very well, he had come to enlist my help. I did not want to get involved in propaganda and told him I was sorry but I could not do it; however there must, I was sure, be several other people in Padang who probably wouldn't mind. No one else, he said, understood good Urdu and in fact they had all told him to come to me. "If you don't help me," he added, "I shall get into terrible trouble and you know what the Japs are like". On this I reversed my decision, hoping that by listening to the broadcast and translating faithfully what was said I would be doing no harm and might even get hold of reliable foreign news.

That night Mr. Ayar came to my quarters and took me to the broadcasting station. A few Japanese officers were there when we arrived, trying to tune in to Singapore. They made me sit down in front of a table and gave me a paper and a pencil. All of a sudden a programme of Indian music came on, a favourite song of mine was being sung. This gave me a queer feeling all over my body and

brought me almost to tears. The Japs tuned it off and went on searching the dial until they hit on another Indian station. I told them not to turn off on the pretext it might be Singapore, but actually I was listening to the news in Hindustani from London, the first time for a whole year that I had heard the Allied news, but the Japs caught the words "R.A.F." and "Germany" and switched off abruptly. Four of them came over to me and asked me what station it was. I said I did not know, but the announcer had said that the R.A.F. were bombing Germany. One officer looked worried, "Did they say anything about the Eastern theatre of war?" When I said "No," their relief was obvious. "Why?" I wondered, "Didn't they want me to hear anything about the East?" Clearly the Japs could not be doing so well.

We did not, in fact, get Singapore that night, but all the same I was glad that I had come. The snippet of news that I had just heard satisfied me that the Japanese propaganda about their speedy advance must be false and I was delighted when I was told to come again in two days' time. I returned as bidden, eager for more news, but this time the Japs were very careful and gave me no chance to hear anything except what they wanted me to hear. Netaji's broadcast came through and in it he called upon all Indians in South-East Asia to fight against the Allies for the freedom of their Motherland.

The Japanese officer in charge of this department was well educated and knew several languages; his manners were pleasing and he was very good to me. I, however, behaved rather badly towards him, answering his questions very abruptly, and yet in spite of my rudeness he offered to employ me in his department. Obviously the Japanese were in need of men for this kind of job, for their anxiety to secure my services was very apparent. Indeed, Mr. Ayar persisted all the way home in pointing out to me how stupid I had been to refuse. "Why," he said, "if you go back to that tug you will almost certainly be torpedoed". From his conversation I learned that there were a lot of American submarines lurking in the waters around Sumatra. When we said goodnight, he reminded me that there was still time for me to think over the Japanese offer and told me he would call again on the following day. "You will be very comfortable," he said, "and get good pay".

Think it over I certainly did; all that night I tossed from side to side in bed, reviewing the whole thing again and again. The offer was very tempting, and I would have done almost anything to stay in Padang. It was a pleasant place and I already had many acquaintances: if I were employed by the Japs, no one would have any fears about befriending me. The next morning I told Mr. Jilani what had happened at the radio station and about the offer of a job. "It's a grand idea," he said. "The world revolves and people must

revolve with it. At this very moment other men are making much the same sort of compromise with their consciences in order to save their lives ". But somehow in spite of Mr. Jilani's approval I could not bring myself to accept the job. I would have loved to remain free if it had been a question of working with an Indian firm, but I could not collaborate with the Japanese propaganda department. Allah in his goodness saved me from yielding to the temptation and once and for all I decided not to accept the job.

So now there seemed nothing for it but for me to join the tug when it came back to Padang. What a difference from the life the Japanese were offering me to have to go out once more in that small craft in rough seas, sometimes soaked in rain, short of sleep and among a crowd of men that I was only too happy to be away from! But then I reminded myself, I had joined the tug to help the men who had been stranded in Nias and now it was Allah's will that I should stay on.

Fortunately everything turned out most beautifully for me. On the 15th July Suak, the Minado, came over to Mr. Jilani's place and told me the tug had arrived. There was now a Japanese officer in charge of the shipping department and he had come to Padang in the tug. He wanted, Suak said, to see me. I did not feel any too happy about this, for although I had finally decided that I would return to the tug, now that the time

came, I felt disinclined to leave the company of the kind Mr. Jilani and the easy life that I had been living in Padang. I do not believe that anyone ever really likes leaving the comforts of land to go to sea in a small craft, but I had no choice in the matter and so I said good-bye to Mr. Jilani and all others who had been so good to me. I thanked them for all their help and kindness and then—very reluctantly—went aboard the tug.

This little sea-going vessel was very small, and although the crew and I had absolutely nothing in common, I could not help coming up against them now and again and could not avoid sitting with them. It was not that I have any objection to mixing with people who are poor ; that was emphatically not the reason, but these men were peculiar in their habits, vicious and in a way jealous of me, treating me at times like a dog. I realized in retrospect that the peace I had felt in Padang had come as much as anything from being away from these men, but now I was back in their midst, and even more unwelcome than before.

Towards the end of July we got back to Sibolga, and now we were told that the tug was to go to Singapore for dry-docking, with the Japanese officer accompanying her. This officer showed me a new chart which he had bought for the express purpose of navigating the tug to Singapore. I saw my chance to get away from the tug for ever, and told him that not only was I not acquainted

with the waters on the East coast of Sumatra but that I also lacked the practical experience needed to take the steam-tug to Singapore. The Jap threatened and cajoled and promised to do all he could for me if only I would agree to go with him, but this time I was determined to leave the tug and did not budge an inch from what I had already said. A week later an Indonesian was brought in to take my place and I was sent to the camp at Santiong.

CHAPTER IX

SANTIONG

July 16th 1943 found me once again a prisoner and virtually under close arrest. At Santiong the policemen were given special orders not to allow me to leave the camp and I could not even go to the bazaar to buy my own food. By now the Japs had stopped supplying food and were giving money instead, and as everything had become so expensive money did not go very far. In an eating-house, for example, a cup of coffee cost one guilder. A guilder was one hundred cents, and my total allowance for a day was just sixty cents ! The same, in fact, as the old men were getting who were excused from work.

By this time the Japs were convinced that most of the men were ignorant and illiterate and could do no harm, and so they were allowed to go to work without police supervision and to move about freely in the bazaar. On their way back from work they used to go to the bazaar to buy vegetables and other eatables, and they quickly made friends with the Bataks and got to know how they could make extra money. The Indonesian policemen who guarded the camp were also very good to us

and, with one exception, never tried to bully us. The exception was evil personified and we hated to see him come on duty.

One afternoon when most of our fellow-prisoners had gone to work, the old men, Abdul Karim and myself were left in camp. Abdul Karim was not well and was trying to snatch a nap, when this policeman came in shouting at the old men to get out and clean the camp. Karim woke up and told him not to make a noise inside the hut, and after a short and violent argument the policeman drew his sword. This was too much for me. I leapt up from where I was lying and, followed by Karim, chased the coward out of the hut. Here he stood waving his sword and threatening to flog us. In the meantime a second policeman, who was on duty with him, came along and sent this policeman back to the station. Later in the evening, Karim and I were taken to the police station to be questioned by the Indonesian police officer in charge. He warned us that it would go very hard with us if we ever attempted to attack a policeman again, and told us that if we had any complaints we should make them to him. He was obviously a supporter of the Allies, as we always found him sympathetic towards us, and on this occasion a relief was sent to replace the policeman who had so provoked us.

For me the life at Santiong was very dull especially after my taste of freedom in Pedang, and when most of the men had gone to work and

Karim had gone to the office to collect our allowances, I helped the old men who did the cooking for want of something better to do. I use to carry water from the bath-house for them and peel potatoes and do all manner of odd jobs. Sometimes I even tried my hand at cooking and proved quite good at it, anyway those who ate the food never complained. Rehman the steward, Abdur Rashid the cargo-gunner and Abdul Aziz the ship's Bhandari were given permission to work in Mr. Khaleel's bakery, and although I myself was no longer able to visit him, he often sent cakes with them when they came back to the camp in the evening.

When I was not helping the old men, I occupied myself in reciting the Quran or saying prayers. Because of my enforced idleness I had begun to understand what a man's religion can really mean to him and daily found myself leaning more and more on my Faith. My prayers now began to give me a real pleasure, a pleasure that made me feel free at heart. Unfortunately I was not well equipped with religious knowledge, but my friend Karim taught me rudiments of Islam. He and I had become inseparable friends. We shared the same clothes, we ate together and we helped each other whenever there was any need for help, and we shared whatever money we were given.

Karim had become very friendly with the Head Clerk, Mr. Hutabarat, who handed him our daily

allowance, and through him he managed to get permission for me to leave the camp during the day, but I only went out once a week, on Friday, to the Mosque to say my prayers. On my way back Mr. Khaleel usually met me at a Chinese restaurant and stood me a cup of coffee. He would also give me money to take back with me.

I do not know how anyone else in my place would have felt, but for my part I preferred to stay in the camp and say my prayers rather than walk about the streets followed by spies and never for one moment able to escape from the atmosphere of war. My prayers and my religious exercises gave me a measure of peace that I could find nowhere else. Unfortunately though the Quran, which I had read in Arabic, did not have a translation, and it was then that I realised that most Muslim children, at least of my generation, did not get the right type of religious education. As children we had learned like parrots, never bothering to learn the meaning of the passages we recited; and later on, as adults, we still failed to discover the Message that this Great Book has to give us. In Padang under the tutelage of Mr. Jilani's brother, the Arabic scholar, I had learned the true meaning of all the passages we recite in our prayers, and I had found myself much attracted by my studies. Now in prison camp I made up my mind to memorize as much as I could of the Holy Book, resolving to find out later, whenever I might get the opportunity, the meaning of all the passages that I had

learned by heart. From that time onwards the time I spent as a prisoner no longer appeared as a waste of my youth; and so absorbed did I become in my devotions that a time came when I could not even sleep at night and when I passed most of the dark hours in non-obligatory prayers. From these prayers I drew a lot of moral courage. They made me firm in my faith in God and fixed in me a resolution to live truthfully and dutifully, no matter what might come my way.

In October 1943 the steam tug returned from its visit to Singapore. Our men who had accompanied it were well clothed, and as usual they brought clothes for their relatives in the camp. Eagerly Karim and I questioned them about the progress of the war, but they were too ignorant to be able to tell us anything and the one person whom we could count on for news, Khaleque, a saloon boy who had gone on the tug as fireman, had not come back. He had met some folks from his own village in Singapore and had deserted the tug. Many of us were sorry that he had not returned, for he was a strong and intelligent young man and very helpful about the camp. When I was very ill at Hilibadalo, it was he who used to carry me from my bed to the lavatory. He had been very keen on learning English too and had joined the crowd of Topasses (sweepers) when I used to give them English lessons in the jungle.

As sure as night follows the day, 1943 was followed by 1944. There was no sign of the war

coming to an end, though the Japs always proclaimed that they were advancing. News was censored so effectually that those living on the West coast of Sumatra did not even know what was happening on the East coast, where day after day Indonesian recruits were being given intensive training and sent to the front. On the other hand, there were many rumours about the growing force of the Indian National Army at Singapore. Thank God, Sumatra was still safe from the I.N.A., though the Indian Independence League had set up its offices in the island long ago. Thank God, too, that the men in our camp were so useless and illiterate that never once did the Japs try to persuade them to join the I.N.A. and the men themselves were quite happy as they were. Many of them were under the impression that they might never return to India, and if they did have to go back one day, well it was in the dim and distant future, so meanwhile they might just as well succumb to the charms of the Malayan girls, and a few of them got married to local girls. Surprisingly the Jap officers did not mind they getting married ; even gave them permission to live outside the camp. Even a Khalasi who only had one eye managed to get a wife, but fortunately or unfortunately for him, she left him only a few days after their marriage. News such as this amused us, though from time to time poor Karim used to be dragged into their domestic quarrels and had a trying time settling their affairs.

While a number of the firemen were making merry with their sweet-looking Indonesian wives, their chief, the tindal who was the chief engineer on the steam-tug, was arrested by the Japs for telling an Indonesian that the Allies would invade the East Indies. He had been betrayed by the Malayan pilot, who stayed permanently on board the tug and who turned out to be a member of the Japanese Secret Service.

This alarmed us a great deal because we thought he might pull us in too, knowing us to be anti-Jap. Fear once again haunted me, but I kept my faith in God and prayed that all might be well. With the tindal gone from the tug, the Serang, who was an old man and who had so far managed to keep away from the tug, was now given charge of the engine room, and a few others, who were his near relations, were also taken aboard. Among them were two firemen, very pious and good-natured, not at all like the majority of the men who had been such a nuisance in the camp. None of them had ever expected to go on the tug, but it must have been pre-ordained for them to die at sea, for scarcely had a couple of weeks elapsed when the news came to us that these two men, with their Serang and two others, had been called to their eternal home.

It happened on 6th February 1944. Karim and I were strolling up and down the yard in front of the camp, others were sitting in groups here

and there and chatting while waiting for the evening prayers. Gunfire was heard—several shots—and we thought that the Japs were practising, as they usually did. Then old Ramzan pointed out that the shots had a rebound, which meant that they could not be blank. Karim left me and went to the town to find out what had happened. Later in the evening we heard that the tug, with a sailing boat in tow, had just been leaving the harbour when an Allied submarine broke surface and sent her to the bottom. Five of our men were killed, two were injured and the rest were picked up later by the Japanese. A number of Japanese soldiers also lost their lives.

The Allies had broken the sea blockade! The sinking of the tug, tragic though it was, could only mean this one thing. The news was a great blcw to the Japanese, who until now had managed to convince the people of the island that no Allied vessel could come within four hundred miles of Sumatra. To counteract the effect of this good news on the population the Japs immediately staged a round-up of suspected Allied spies and, to their everlasting shame, the Indonesian members of the Secret Service took pride in betraying their own countrymen and stood by while they were being beaten up by the Japs. Just so that they might do themselves a bit of good, they also submitted a list of the names of all the people they thought might just possibly be spies—my own name amongst them.

The first sufferers in this drive, however, were the Minadoes, the Ambonese and the Javanese who had been in the Dutch army. Most of them had been taken on as policemen after the Japanese occupation of Sumatra, but now they were all hauled in and interned. Amongst the internees was Suak, my friend on the tug, who, I was pretty certain, was not a spy. These arrests made the whole town uneasy, especially the Chinese, who were scared stiff and kept themselves away from everyone who might be suspected. There was a worried, tense look on everyone's face, but all the same preparations went ahead for a 'Pasar Malam' (night carnival) to be held in the bazaar. This was part of the Japanese policy—to hold some sort of amusement when things were not going well on the war front—and believe me, it had a tremendous effect on the Indonesians.

We had now stepped into the month of March. In spite of the state of unrest in the town I was not feeling frightened and was getting deeply interested in my prayers. At my request Karim was trying his best to find someone who would translate the Quran for me. Many Indonesians knew Arabic, but I wanted to find a man with a thorough knowledge of the Book. And then, on March 18th, Karim met a professor who had been to Mecca and was a very good scholar of Arabic. Karim had been very much impressed by his learning and that night, before going to bed, he told me all about him. We started making plans

and he promised to take me to him the next day so that I might have my first lesson. We chatted till midnight and then when I fell asleep I was feeling unutterably happy that at last a way had been found for me to learn that Message which the Holy Quran had to give me. Next day, however, the Japanese came and took me away.

CHAPTER X

JAIL

We have all heard the famous saying, " Man proposes and God disposes ". Well, it is very true, and we must remember that the Lord Almighty, the Supreme Ruler of the Universe, knows a lot more than we do about what is best for us. He is the best of all planners, and although we may think that by not fulfilling our wishes the Almighty's dispositions are not in our best interests, yet in retrospect the change can always be seen to have been for the better. So it has been with me : in spite of all the hardships I have undergone I still say it has all been for my good.

I had gone to sleep that night with the thought that I should awaken with the happy feeling that I was going to the professor of Arabic to learn something which had for me become an essential, although until that day I had never given it a thought before. But something else was in store for me, something not at all pleasant. I had not slept four hours when I was woken up by someone tapping my feet. For a moment I could not believe what I was seeing. Then I sat up with a jerk. My early visitors were eight members

of the Japanese military police. One of them, apparently the leader, held a torch and a long roll of paper with names written on it. He made sure that I was the person he was looking for and then asked me to follow him, giving me just enough time to put on my trousers—I was sleeping in shirt and under-pants—and to grab my Loongyi and a black Malayan cap I had. While this was going on the rest of the men woke up, and Karim, who was sleeping next to me, sat up and looked blank. I wonder what thoughts were flashing through his mind at that moment. One of the Japs jumped on my bed and threw the pillow aside to see if I had any secret papers underneath it. Having satisfied themselves I had none, they led me out of the hut. Here in the open were fifteen soldiers with fixed bayonets, one of them holding on to a Chinese whom I recognised later to be Lohot, a clerk in the shipping office. They tied my hands behind my back with a strong rope and then led the two of us into the street.

"Now," I said to myself, "What have I done wrong? Where have I slipped up?" I thought and thought again, but could not get to the bottom of it. It was nearly 4-30 in the morning and still very dark; the street was deserted save for our small party. The houses on both sides were locked and not a beam of light was to be seen anywhere. There was not a soul in sight to say, "Oh, the poor fellow is being taken by the Japs". All our neighbours had always given me a smile when-

ever I passed them, had always consoled me and told me to have patience, my good days would come. But now they were all asleep while the 'Orange Pooti' (the white man), as they called me, was being taken to prison.

Our party stopped half-way down the street and some of the soldiers surrounded a house while the officers went and knocked at the front door, calling the inmates to come and take a telegram. But the inmates were also very clever. The man tried to run away, while his wife kept shouting, "Wait, I am coming". Night postmen, however, have no patience, they believe in breaking in the door ; and so the dumpy little Chinaman was caught before he could jump out of the back window. Had he jumped anyway, he would have found fixed bayonets to greet him. So now there was another one of us. Obviously the Japs were rounding up the last of the suspects whose names had been submitted by the Indonesian betrayers.

I still could not understand why this calamity had come upon me. I tried to think what sin I might have committed that Allah should be punishing me in this way, for it could not have happened, I reminded myself, unless the Lord had willed it, but still I could not fathom the matter. I resolved instead to possess my soul in patience, asking His forgiveness and praying for deliverance from the hands of the Japanese devils ; and I made up my mind that whatever might happen, I would

remain true to the Lord, my Creator. Then I realised that I might be taken to a cell and never see the sun rise. How then could I know the direction of the Ka'ba towards which I must bow and sing His praise ? I forgot all my other worries and concentrated on remembering the west every time we took a turn.

We were taken to the office of the military police, where a high-ranking Japanese officer registered our names and gave orders to the soldiers to unfasten the ropes with which our hands were tied. After that a soldier was told to take me away. He held a rifle with one hand and with the other he held my wrist as tight as he could. I wondered where we were bound for and I quickly found out, for there was the jail ahead of us. How often had I walked past this jail when I was still working on the tug ! Mr. Khaleel's house was near it and I had many times seen the convicts being taken out for work in the morning and being taken back again after work in the evening. But I had never dreamt that those massive gates would one day close behind me.

" Bismilla-hir-Rahma-nir-Rahim, " I said as I stepped inside the gate. In the office of the jail was a grim-faced Japanese officer. He told me to hand over my wrist watch and my purse. My purse was empty, but I felt very sorry to part with my watch for it had been the result of three years' hard

work—I had got it as a prize for being the best signaller on the "Dufferin" in 1941. What is more, if the Japs found out why I had got the watch (and my name and other initials were inscribed on the back of it), their suspicions of me would be strengthened.

Two Japanese soldiers and an Indonesian now took charge of me and told me to get out of the office. The Indonesian had a heavy bunch of keys which he swung to and fro, and he looked very important as he opened the big door of room No. 1. This was the biggest of the twelve rooms inside the jail, measuring roughly twenty feet by fifteen. As I went in, the door shut behind me. The room, I now saw, had high walls on all sides, but there was a little opening near the ceiling through which I could see that dawn was already breaking. There was also a window with iron bars facing the front, but this, at the moment, was shut. I was not the only occupant of this massive cell ; two Eurasians had had the honour of entering it before me. We greeted each other with a smile, and then I took up a place in the north-west corner of the room. There was a long stretch of wooden planks joined together, each six inches wide, all along the north and west sides of the wall, and a quick glance showed me that there were cane mats to sleep on, but no pillows or blankets. Dawn had broken, and it was time for morning prayers, and so I faced the Ka'ba and performed my duty to God.

When the morning sun was well above the horizon, and the men, women and children in every nook and corner of Sibolga were wide-awake, many already sipping their morning tea, the front window of our room was opened to let in that beam of the sun's rays without which human beings wilt and fade away. So we were at least to have sunshine in our grim prison and also, joy of joys ! fresh water. In one corner of the room was a big tub with a tap, full of fresh water for drinking and washing, and alongside that a big wooden pot for sanitary purposes. Things could have been a lot worse, I thought, not knowing then how many of us were soon to be living in that room.

While I was at my prayers a few more suspects arrived, but with full daylight suspected spies began to pour in. Every five or ten minutes we would hear the jingling of the bunch of keys and then the door would open to let in one, two or even more at a time. Most of these entrants were well-to-do young men working in the local post office, and in spite of the dangers we were facing, I could not help being amused at the weird assortment of clothing ; some were in Pyjamas, some in under-pants, others in shorts or Loongyis. From the look of bewilderment on their faces I could tell that their arrest had, like my own, been absolutely unexpected. We could not talk to each other, as the Jap soldier guarding our door had given strict orders that there should be no talking or whispering.

At 9 o'clock all the occupants of Room No. 1 were taken to the little office inside the jail where our physical details were taken—height, weight and so on. Then we were each given a number to pin on to our shirts and told that in future our numbers would be used instead of our names. My number was five.

It will, I think, make the rest of this narrative easier to follow if I now explain briefly the way the Japanese carry out a cross-examination ; or rather, if I give my reader an idea of the kind of men who carry it out, and into whose charge we had been handed.

The Japanese military police, better known to us as the " Kempe Tai ", is that body of officers which deals with crime and with secret service work. They are the men who inflict punishment on prisoners, and they also have the right to punish any soldier of the Japanese Army who may misbehave himself. They are a fierce-looking band of Thugs and even the Jap soldiers are dead scared of them. In Sumatra, they had a very big organisation with headquarters at Boekit Tingi, the capital.

After the sinking of the tug, M. P. officers from all over Sumatra, even a few from Singapore, collected at Sibolga to enquire into the cause of this disaster. There were over fifteen of them and they worked in pairs, each pair being responsible for cross-examining ten to twelve prisoners. This

speeded up the enquiry considerably, though even so they took their time about it. Our examination was held either in the office of the military police, or actually in the houses where those officers were staying. A truck would call at the prison gate to collect prisoners and then drop them off at the houses of their respective examiners.

All twelve rooms in the jail were now occupied, the twelfth room by two Minado women. Prisoners were distributed in such a way that any two persons suspected of being involved in the same case could not see or talk to each other, and the practice of using numbers instead of names was intended to prevent people in the other rooms knowing who was being called. While a prisoner was being taken out of a room, the windows of all other rooms were closed. The prisoners fell into two groups : in the group to which I belonged, people were suspected of being individual spies ; those in the other set, consisted of soldiers of the ex-Dutch Army, and a few wealthy Chinamen were accused of running a whole secret service organisation for the Allies. Some of them, like my friend Suak, had friends in both groups. As for the actual methods of cross-examination, I think I had better not give you the details now, for as yet, thank God, I still have had no personal experience of them.

Here were we all then, each with a number, each sitting in his allotted place, each waiting for the dreaded summons, each with a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach. In my case, this was

caused less by anxiety than by hunger, for it was now nearly eleven o'clock and I had not eaten anything that morning. That other people were feeling the same could be seen by their faces, which lit up every time the jingling of the bunch of keys was heard. At last the door opened and instead of the usual frightened suspect, in came two convicts, each carrying several metal bowls. In each bowl was a handful of rice, some boiled leaves and two pieces of tapioca root which tasted rather like potatoes, neither sweet nor sour. The rice contained a quantity of salt so small as to be negligible. I received my plate with a 'terima kasih' (thank you), and began to eat what I had been given. It was not the first time I had eaten this kind of food and although I was the youngest in the room, just twenty years old, I felt I had more experience than the others, many of whom just looked at their plates and burst into tears. Some ate up the tapioca and left the rice and leaves and then began to sob. Very few of them finished the whole plate. I had no mug for drinking water, so I went to the tub and washed my hands in the plate. The water left over then went down my throat and so did my "washing up" water which I could not bear to throw away. Then sitting in my corner, I thanked Allah for giving me something to eat at all.

In the afternoon six more men came in, brought from outside Sibolga. Three of them were wealthy Chinese merchants, one was a Batak policeman

and of the two others, one was a farmer and the other a very old man, a Zamindar. This old man saw me saying my prayers and joined me ; and within a few days I had a good many companions, including most of the young men who had kept away at the beginning but who now felt that they needed the comfort and solace of Religion now they were inside the jail, however they might have managed to get along without it before.

Our last meal was served at four o'clock, the same sort of thing that we had had at eleven ; and as the days went by, there was to be the same deterioration in quality, the same total disappearance of salt as in my previous experiences as a prisoner. Every evening, just before sunset, the jailers would come in to count us, and we would also be given an opportunity to fill up our tub with fresh water from the tap outside. We also had to empty and clean the wooden pot so that it could serve us during the night. For these duties we organised ourselves in pairs, each pair taking a turn at filling up the tub or cleaning the "dirty pot". The first night, after I had finished my evening prayers, I settled down to get some sleep. The cane mat on which I lay was not long enough for myself, being only four feet by two and a half, so a good portion of my legs were out on the wooden plank. I had no pillows and rested my head on my black Malayan cap which was half an inch thick. At times I tried laying my head on my arms, but then my circulation would not function properly. It was

fairly cold and I had no blankets to cover myself, though my Loongi served the purpose to a certain extent. There was dead silence in the room, but still sleep would not come and the electric light, burning all night long, made "getting off" more difficult still. My thoughts wandered back to Santiong; I remembered all the occupants there. "How", I wondered, "was Abdul Karim?" What good friends we had been and now we were parted not knowing when, if at all, we would meet again! My thoughts went back a little further, beyond Hilibadalo and Goonoongsitoli, beyond Sister Hank Visker and the village hospital, back beyond the *Chilka.* I pictured myself in Calcutta, at home with my parents and my brothers and sisters. What would they be thinking? Most probably they had given me up for dead, yet I was alive, alive but in deadly peril. Would I ever get back to them? How *could* I get back to them when there wasn't a hope of escape?

Suddenly I realised that I was allowing myself to become the victim of futile thoughts. Had I forgotten my Maker? Forgotten God the Beneficent and Merciful, who had kept me alive on a lifeboat when badly wounded and without food for six days? He Who had rescued us from death in the jungles of Nias, Who had been forever with me throughout the last three years, never allowing me to go without food even when I had no means of buying it. Now, just because another calamity had befallen me, should I forget

Him? "No", I said to myself, "I must look to Him for help and guidance". I then closed my eyes and prayed to Him thus :—

> "O Lord, The Most High, The Most Gracious and Merciful, there is no other God but You, The One and The True. O Lord, Who hath power over all things, have Mercy on me ; Give me, oh, I beseech Thee, the moral courage and patience to bear whatever comes my way without betraying my Faith in You. O Lord, forgive me for my past deeds, for You are Most Merciful and Oft-forgiving. I am yet young ; let me return to my parents once again ; give me the chance to live in this world and serve You as best I can. O Maker of the Earth and the Heavens, have Mercy on my comrades who are sharing my misfortunes and save us all from the hands of these devils, and may no other soul—not even my worst enemy—fall into the clutches of these barbarians! O Lord, I pray to Thee to show me the right path and help me keep myself away from all sins : send me consolation so that I may be cheerful even inside this jail".

My eyes were full of tears as I prayed, but I felt relief and contentment suffusing my body, as though I had been released from a heavy load. Then I fell into a deep sleep.

CHAPTER XI

JAPANESE TORTURE

The singing of birds from the neighbouring trees heralded for us the dawn of the second day in jail. The front window of our room was closed and it was suffocatingly hot inside. We wished we could get some fresh air. Inspite of the small amount of food that we had had on the previous day, the " dirty pot " had been made good use of, and the stale air smelled unpleasantly.

It was broad daylight when the watchman opened our door to announce that we could go out and have a bath. At one end of the jail compound was a little pool from which we drew water and in which we also bathed ourselves, while the Japanese guards stood around ready to bayonet anyone who showed signs of wanting to scale the high wall. We all stripped and had a very quick bath, while the watchman kept on shouting that we should hurry up. I dried myself with the Loongi which had served me as a blanket the night before. Before our door was locked on us again, a couple of convicts came in with bowls containing our breakfast—two small pieces of tapioca. The front window was still shut, as the occupants of other rooms were being taken out in turn for their baths.

When all the prisoners had bathed and all the subjects of this little " state " had been returned to their respective places, the large window was opened. The rays of sunshine with all their brightness poured into our room and there was a rush amongst the men inside, each trying to get a place where he could expose his body to a beam of natural light. The lift to our spirits that the morning sun brought, however, did not last for long, for our hearts began to beat fast when the horn of a truck was heard outside and a few Japanese soldiers, led by the watchman jingling his bunch of keys, were seen making for our door. There was a clatter as the door opened, a shuffling of feet and a clearing of throats ; a list of numbers was called out. The innocent young man known as " Number Five " was among those to be called from the room and escorted by Jap soldiers towards the main gate of the jail.

Fresh air greeted us with all its sweetness as we drove along the streets of Sibolga, and we could think of nothing except that we were headed for an " interview " with the Japanese military police. The truck stopped in front of a little bungalow, and three of us (including myself) were led inside. The throbbing of my heart increased in speed and I found it impossible to control myself, and with that trembling of the heart, I prayed to God to have Mercy on me.

In the drawing-room were seated two Japanese officers who greeted us curtly. Then the " usher ",

who was a Korean, made a funny noise in his throat, and with his hands signalled me to follow him. We passed along a corridor to a room the doors of which were shut, and here he made me kneel down in the same position as we use when saying our prayers, but with my palms resting on my thighs. He then indicated that I must shut my eyes and keep them shut, executing this order with an ugly noise and a vigorous wave of his hands. I had not been long in this position before my knees were paining me and the whole of my body ached. I shivered and my heart throbbed so heavily that I felt as if a heavy piece of iron was being hammered within my frame. I thought the Japs were going to execute me there and then. Under my breath I repeated the 'Kalima,' which a Muslim is supposed to recite while he breathes his last; and though terrified, I was prepared to return to my Eternal Home while saying that there is no god except Allah and Muhammed is His Prophet.

To add to my terror, I could hear a person inside the room being pounded to pieces by an officer of the military police. It was the dumpy little Chinaman who had tried to escape from the night postman. The officer was shouting at him, and each time he struck him the poor fellow fell against the door, frantically shouting for help and pleading that he was innocent.

It was bad enough to be tortured; but it was worse to know in advance what that punishment was

to be. Kneeling outside the door of the room in which a fellow-prisoner was being tortured, I felt that even death would be preferable to such a beating as that poor little Chinaman was then getting. I could not imagine how my body, never very robust and now much weakened by all I had been through, would ever stand up to similar treatment. I prayed to the Lord, my Maker, to have mercy upon me and to save me from such a merciless hammering. I knew that no power on earth could get me out of this evil but the Grace and Mercy of God.

At least an hour passed in that frightful state. I was concentrating on some verses of the Quran when a tap on my head made me open my eyes and look up. It was the Korean ordering me to go into the room.

I was made to sit on the floor and then one of the officers, who spoke the Malayan language started questioning me. By now I had learnt enough of the language to be able to converse freely. He asked me various questions regarding my family, my boyhood, education and training, and also how I had happened to come to Sumatra. This officer was very gentle and on no occasion during our conversation did he show any signs of losing his temper. So the Japanese, I felt with relief, could be decent on occasion.

Apparently their way of subjecting me to strain on this occasion had been to make me wait outside

the door while the Chinaman was being cross-examined, thinking thereby to break down my resistance before beginning to question me.

At one o'clock the truck arrived and I was told to go. All the way back to the jail I thanked the Lord Almighty for having had mercy upon me and saved me from the hands of the officer who had been beating up the little Chinaman.

On my return to the jail I got my share of the handful of rice, tapioca and boiled leaves that had made up the morning meal. I found that during my absence, the truck had called a number of times and had taken others to their respective examiners. Some had returned, but there were quite a number who had not come back yet—the ones who were being examined by officers who believed in hitting before talking. It was not until evening that the last of them returned, and when the jailer came as usual to count us there were many swollen faces and bruised bodies among us huddled on the cane mats and moaning with pain. Some of these were heads of families and wept when they thought of their children with no one to provide for their food.

I did my best to make the wounded comfortable and I massaged their wounds. I have always been skilful at massage, and now I felt that God had preserved me thus for so that I might use this special gift of mine to console the weeping. I

tried also to explain to them that the Lord is the Sustainer of all the world ; and to bring them comfort just as, once, Abdul Karim had brought comfort to the prisoners in Goonoongsitoli after their return from the jungle, "Your children will be fed," I told them. "No man will ever dare take another man's food, but you all must have patience ; God, Who is most Merciful and Most Gracious, will in His own good time most certainly release us from this evil." To my surprise my fellow-prisoners listened attentively to what I had said and I thanked the Lord for putting into my mouth the power to help them towards understanding.

The following day I was not called for examination so I spent most of my time nursing the wounded. The Indonesians were by this time too terrified of the Japanese guards to help even their best friends, so there was no one but myself to look after the wounded, whose numbers increased steadily during the day.

There were still many who had not been called for cross-examination and during the whole day the sound of that bunch of keys jingling set every heart beating faster. Even though I had finished one interview, I was also in the same condition. The morning of the third day, however, passed off without my being called out, but in the afternoon, when I had least expected it, armed soldiers were ready at the gate to escort me to the examiners.

Fortunately this day also passed off peacefully. I was asked about my movements in Sibolga and the various persons I used to visit. I prayed to God that they would not mention Suak, for I had resolved to speak only the truth and if I had been asked about him I would have been obliged to let out a few secrets about his past history with the Dutch Air Force. But the Lord is everywhere, He knows everything and He has power over all things. Everyone else I knew was mentioned, but Suak's name did not come in. Later, on another occasion, an officer did bring up his name ; but as he only asked me what work Suak did on the tug and what sort of man he was, I was able to tell him the truth, that he was a man good at heart but very fond of the bottle and the company of the fair sex, and I was again saved from disclosing a fact which might have got him into a lot of trouble.

During the next few days I was not called again, though a number of my fellow-prisoners were badly beaten up. The old Zamindar was hammered so mercilessly that all his artificial teeth broke down, and for the next few days he was very ill. Then there was a Chinese dentist whose right leg swelled up as a result of continuous stamping—it had to be operated on without any anaesthetic inside the Jail. There were some who returned from the office of the military police unable to do more than lie on their plank beds, and on the following day they were called again and had to be carried

to the house of torture. As one of the few who were unhurt, I considered it more than ever my duty to do all that was in my power to help the sick, and at times I forced myself to keep awake the whole night by reading verses of the Quran so that I could attend to them.

But the time came when I was called again by my examiners, this time not to the polite officer in the room, but to the backyard where I was made to kneel down on the edge of an empty wooden box with my arms stretched upwards. A man stood behind me with a stick to flog me on the back whenever my arms fell down. This was my first taste of torture, only a beginning, but I could very well imagine what might follow. Even while I knelt there, nearly burning in the scorching heat of the sun and almost at the point of collapse, another prisoner was being beaten inside that room. I could hear him pleading with the Japs to kill him once and for all. "Yes, you will die", came the reply, "but it will be slowly and steadily".

When the sun had reached its zenith and was about to begin its descent, the stomachs of the little warriors began to tickle them and demand food, so the tortures were adjourned for an hour. I was kept in a small room near the kitchen while the Japs and other prisoners disappeared. The Hei Ho (an Indonesian soldier), who was left to look after me, sat on a bench outside the room and chatted to a maidservant who was hanging around

the place. Every Japanese bungalow had one two, or more maidservants who cooked their food, looked after their clothes and saw to other, more intimate, personal comforts. The Hei Ho was a very young fellow, about eighteen ; his name was Omar and I had known him to be a nasty piece of work from the time I first set eyes on him. He had now become so pro-Japanese that he had even adopted their style of speaking and, like them, made free use of his hands.

I was very hungry, but the truck did not come to take me to the jail for lunch and as no one here gave me anything to eat either, I sat down on the floor, leaned against the wall and, closing my eyes, concentrated on some verses from the Quran so that I might not think of the food that my body so desperately needed. I was, however, brought back to the reality of my plight by a terrific kick on the hip and saw Omar frowning down at me, asking why I was sleeping. I told him that my eyes had been shut, but I had been praying, not sleeping. At this he made an ugly noise like the Japs do and retreated. He was only a boy about two years younger than myself and brought up, as I had been, to follow Islam. I prayed to Allah to have mercy on him and to lead him to the right path. By the grace of God the thought of revenge (even against the Japs) did not find a place in my heart, even in those darkest of days.

The whole day passed before I was taken out of this tiny room by another Hei Ho and escorted

back to the jail ; this second soldier, Israil, hailed from Padang and was always extremely good to us. I told him that I had had nothing to eat during the day and asked him to tell the jailers to give me the rice due to me. He kept his promise, but unfortunately all the extra rice had been eaten up by the convicts and barely the usual handful for the evening meal was left. However, half a loaf is better than no bread, and when I had cleaned my plate and drunk the water, I gave thanks to God. I was stiff and sore from the pains of the day but still able to be of service to the injured during the night.

It was over a month now since we had been rounded up as suspects. All of us had had our 'interviews,' and those who had been injured were recovering fast. One day a Jap officer took the inmates of Room No. 1 to a patch of waste land at the back of the office of the military police. Here we were set to work, having first taken off our shirts for fear the mud and the filth would spoil them. Those who had under-pants even took off their trousers, for clothes were very precious, particularly to prisoners like myself who, unlike the local people, had no relatives close by to send them the weekly bundle that the Japs allowed. The work was hard and seemed harder still in that scorching sun, especially as we had become very weak on our meagre saltless diet ; nevertheless we enjoyed being in the open and hoped that in future we might be taken out every day. At one o'clock

we returned to the jail for lunch and an hour's break, and then out again. For the first few days Japanese soldiers guarded the compound where we worked ; later only Hei Hoes were left to look after us. Most of them were good and kind except Omar, the fellow whom I have mentioned before. These Hei Hoes belonged to the military police, so they had their quarters behind the M. P. office. Israil had his young wife staying there and like him she was very kind ; one day I remember she made us all a fruit drink. The interviews were still going on, but no harm was done to anybody, and after one more interview which passed off without incident, I felt that I was clear of suspicion. I even hoped, as many of the others did, that I would be released quite soon.

CHAPTER XII

THE "INTERROGATION" CONTINUES

A month later—it was now early in May 1944—and the waste land had become a vegetable garden! We had also built air-raid shelters and a motor road. While on the job I seldom had to miss my prayers as whenever we got some time to rest, I would go into a room belonging to one of the Hei Hoes to pray. The Japs got used to the idea and never stopped me.

Then one day while I was working in the fields the Jap officer, who had given me my very first interview, called me away and took me into an isolated room. He warned me to speak the truth and then said that Suak had told him that he and I had planned to escape to India. "We had not," I said, "planned to escape to India, but we had discussed the possibilities of meeting an Allied submarine and going over to the Allies". At this he told me to give a detailed account of all our discussions, stating the date and the place where we had talked each time. "That," I said, "is too much for me", for it was over a year since Suak and I had discussed

them and I did not remember when and where we had talked, let alone minute details of the conversations. "But it was true", I admitted, "that we would have liked to go over to the Allies". At this he gave me a few clouts on the head by way of reply. In the meantime the other officer—the one who had tortured the Chinaman—had entered the room and seemed deeply interested in our conversation. This fellow was very intimidating, tall and massive and quite different in appearance from the other little man. I was afraid he mean to take over the "investigation," but fortunately for me the sun was setting and it was time for the M. P. officers to stop work. All the same they did not send me back to jail, but put me inside a wooden cage in a garage near the office.

I have said "cage," because it was nothing better than that. The garage had been divided into two compartments, and these were surrounded by wooden planks with just a narrow opening left through which food could be served. These cages were used for special prisoners who were required for constant questioning. In the compartment which I entered there were two fellows who had been there for over a month, constantly guarded by the Japanese soldiers posted outside the cage. I had not been there long before a Jap brought me my food, just a ball of boiled rice about three inches in diameter with a little sauce sprinkled on

it, and no plate either. I had to hold the ball with both my hands to eat it. Even dogs are served food on a plate or a leaf.

I chatted for a while with my colleagues and then, after finishing my prayers, I went to sleep, or rather I settled down and tried to sleep. But sleep did not come so easily. Again I wondered what it was that had led me into this affair, but still I could discover no reason. The best way I could satisfy myself was to submit myself to the Will of the Lord my Maker and ask Him to give me courage and patience. The following afternoon the enormous Jap took me out of my cage, tied my hands behind my back and then led me gloatingly inside one of the rooms, where he tied me to the leg of an iron bed. He then began to stamp on my knees and to beat me, asking me to tell him all the details of my conversations with Suak. I told him that I was speaking the truth, that I did not exactly remember when and where we had conversed, but we had said we were anxious to get out of the hands of the Japanese. Still he would not believe me and went on clouting and hammering. At last having got nothing further out of me by these methods, he untied the rope from the bed and took me out on the verandah.

Now the next stage of the torture began. For this I was made to sit on the ground with my legs stretched out forward and my hands tied behind my back. The tail of the rope tying my hands

was led over an iron bar in the ceiling and then pulled taut, so that my arms were stretched upwards until I felt that my shoulder blades would break at any moment. Then this Japanese monster sat on a stool in front of me with his heels pressed hard on my outstretched legs, so that he was squeezing my knees between his feet, while other Japs came and hit me on my head and kicked me or, worst of all, pulled the rope with a jerk. Looking back on it now I cannot imagine how I survived those hours of extreme pain and agony. But my Maker had willed that I should not die so soon and He gave me unlimited courage and patience to bear up under the pain. Again and again I was asked to give details of my conversations with Suak ; I tried hard to remember, but I found it impossible to do so. All I could say was, " I am speaking the truth, I did discuss such things with Suak, but I do not remember what we said in detail, except that I am anti-Japanese ".

Something seemed to go wrong with the sun that day ; its passage through the skies could never have been so slow before and, in collaboration with it, the hands of the clock would not move either. Every breath of my body, every hair on my head, seemed to be screaming aloud and pleading to the Lord Almighty to have mercy on me. Again and again I felt that my time had come and that I would not live to see the sun set behind the western hills, but each despairing thought was

followed by the thought that only my Maker could kill me, no human being had that power so long as I never, never for one instant, gave up hope.

More than two hours had elapsed and still the Japs were not satisfied. Fortunately for me one of them had a brain wave and sent for Suak. They seated him in front of me and told him to write on a piece of paper all that he remembered of our conversations. He complied with their orders and then one by one they reminded me of the places where we had conversed. Suak also volunteered the information that I had told him that the Japs would never enter India ; this I admitted to be true and it resulted, for me, in a renewed bout of stamping and clouting. There were now four Jap officers surrounding us, one with a heavy stick in his hand, and you can imagine what we felt like.

At long last the crimson disc decided to say goodbye to us and return to the place where it would rest during the night. As it disappeared behind the one-storied buildings of Sibolga to plunge into the Indian Ocean, the sky became blood-red with streaks of yellow and grey. A beautiful evening it was; no doubt, the men, women and children of Sibolga had put on their best clothes and were out on the roads for their evening stroll ; sweethearts were meeting at this moment and walking hand in hand towards the picture-houses, while the pious and the faithful were heading towards the big Mosque which stood at the Southern

end of the big bazaar. As for the mighty representatives of 'Tenno Hikka' (the Emperor of Japan), they realised that they had done their duty for the day and they had no intention of wasting such an inviting evening. They retired to their bungalows to make love to the hundred and one 'comfort' girls who were kept to satisfy and cheer the warriors of the Far East. But we, Suak and I, had no share in that beautiful evening. Far from it, Suak was sent back to jail with an escort and I was taken back to my cage. Here the rope which had held my hands in that painful position was untied, and I cannot express the relief I felt at being able to move them again although by this time my fingers had become quite numb. The Jap officer just before me, softening for a brief moment, gave me a banana to eat too and then put me back in the cage.

I lay on the wooden floor trying to close my eyes and go to sleep, but my body was racked with pain. Also the happenings of the day were still with me, haunting me like a terrible nightmare. Had I really been through so much pain and still survived ? I thanked God that I was still alive ; thanked Him too that He had given me the patience and courage to bear the torture. Life was still precious to me, and the desire to return home made me determined to survive whatever these devils might still have in store for me. Day by day my faith in Allah had become firmer and firmer and I prayed to him to give me continued courage and patience.

The night was long and weary, sleep would not come, and although the dawn meant the return of another day, with all its possibilities of torture, I lay there longing for the night to pass. The crowing of a cock near the garage informed me that a new day had dawned. I felt happy that the hours of darkness were over, but the thought of the day to come set my heart beating fast, and it was not long after sunrise that the massive Jap officer started on me again. The first thing that he said to me was that I was a very bad man and he would re-examine me right from the beginning. He pushed me on to the floor and then said, "Angkou orang Inggris Ka ?" (Are you an Englishman) ? When I said that I was not an Englishman, he insisted that I had better own up or else things would go very ill with me, but I stuck to my first, the correct answer.

From his speech and actions it was evident that he was working up into a rage. Suddenly he gripped my hands tight and led me to the lawn ; here he caught hold of my shirt collar, put a leg behind mine and pushed me hard on to the ground, shouting "Inggris". I stood up and said, "Tida saja India" (No, I am an Indian). The next moment I found myself going over his head and down on the ground, head first. Then up again and back over his head, then over his back and on to my head again. Thank God, I managed not to plead with him to kill me or spare me, instead

each time I hit the earth I said, "Alhamdu Lillah" (All praise be to Allah). More than ever I believed that for something I had done, although I did not know what it might be, Allah was punishing me. Yet I knew too that the Lord, who is most Merciful, was watching over my punishment to see that it did not exceed the limit of my endurance. I was thrown from every conceivable angle, I hit the ground with every part of my body, but thanks to the Lord, there was no sign of blood, no swelling and none of my limbs broken. Surely this proved God's love and mercy for His creatures who so easily forget Him the moment their troubles cease.

The Jap, who had now been trying his Jiu Jitsu for over fifteen minutes, looked very tired and was panting hard. So he told his interpreter, an Indonesian, to take over from him and try his hand on me. This fellow did manage to throw me on to the ground, but it was evident that he had not been given any training in the art and the Jap took over once again. Feeling refreshed after his little rest, he was now fast and quick, so fast and so quick that I find it difficult to write on a piece of paper all the things that he did to me. And yet, how that half hour dragged! People usually see stars at night, but here was I seeing them during the day, and plenty of them too, of all shapes and sizes. But there is an end to everything and even punishment from God must also have a limit. At last, finding that I had not gone back on my word, the

Jap stopped the Jiu Jitsu and took me inside the office, where once again I was made to sit on the floor and answer his questions.

This time, after asking me the usual questions relating to my childhood, he went on to ask me every detail about my parents, brothers and sisters. Unfortunately I did not know how much land my father had or what was his yearly income and the Jap, thinking that I was trying to hide something from him, slogged me hard on the head with a leather belt. Similarly, when I told him that I had not been to a university, he did not believe me and hammered me all the more. The leather belt was thick and hard and the buckle fell on my head, while the tail end stung my body though, thank God, in some way my face was spared. How could I convince this fiend, who did not want to be convinced, that I was speaking the truth and nothing but the truth ? To add to all this his Indonesian interpreter suggested that, because I could speak fluent Urdu, the Captain of the ship had ordered me to remain with the Indian crew instead of being interned with the other officers, just so that I could spy on the Japs. I found that I had no helper except the God above me and in silence I prayed to Him to have mercy upon me.

A brief respite from pain came when, promptly at one o'clock, the Japs went into the dining room to have their lunch. I sat on the floor in the corridor and was glad enough to get the rice ball which a Hei Ho brought me.

But now, having had a good lunch and a smoke, the Jap felt sufficiently restored to start on me again. This time he made me sit down on the floor with my legs stretched forward and my ankles wedged tightly under the wooden bar of the chair that he was sitting on. Every now and again he stamped on my shin with his heavy boots. This, however, did not relieve me for one moment from the onslaught of the leather belt, which continuously and unflaggingly took care of my head and shoulders. This was a day of incessant torture, a hundred times worse than I had experienced before. All praise to God, the Cherisher and Sustainer of All the World, who gave me the strength and courage to survive the torture and helped me at all times and in whatever peril to return to Him and ask Him for help and guidance.

The hands of the clock now pointed to five, the windows of the room were being closed and the other officers were putting away their respective files and locking up important papers. My examiner left me for a while to do likewise and then took me out of the room towards the kitchen. Outside the kitchen he sat down on top of a box while I remained standing in front of him. " What a pity! you have become so thin", he said. I managed a smile and reminded him that we got very little to eat inside the jail and then to my great surprise, he called out to the cook to give me a plate full of rice and an egg with it, going on to tell the cook's boy to bring me his own share of bananas. So

I was compensated in some measure for the day's torture. I could not believe my eyes when I saw a plate full of rice, eggs and when I realised it was all for me, I thanked the Lord Who, I believed, had sent me this food. No human being, not even this brutal Jap, could stop what the Lord wanted to give and even the cruellest of men, I realised, have some spot of kindness in their hearts through which the Lord can work.

My interview next day was nothing compared to the ordeal I had just been through and I felt my examination was at last drawing to a close. Shortly afterwards I was sent back to jail.

CHAPTER XIII

SHABAAN AND RAMAZAAN IN 1944

With my examination finished, the Japanese torturers no longer needed me in a cage "on the premises" and they sent me back to jail. Soon I was back at work in the garden behind the office of the military police, rejoicing in what seemed like freedom in comparison with what I had been through. Once, I remember, a number of us were cutting grass near the Hei Hoes' quarters and Israil's wife, who had just finished cooking rice, took a crust from the bottom of the pot, held it up in her hand and asked us if we would like to have it. Three of us rushed towards her like hungry dogs and ate every scrap of it. One of them was the chief postmaster of Sibolga, so the reader can deduce for himself how much we had all been reduced by circumstances. Who would think, in the comfort of his own home, that an evening could become memorable because three of us had had a little more to eat !

A few days after my return, I was surprised to see an old Sukhani from the *Chilka* and a few Khalasis brought in. They told me that Suak, under God knows what torture, had told the Japs that they too had talked of escaping to India.

The Sukhani, an old man with many years' experience at sea, had always had a habit of talking too much, and he must have boasted to Suak about what a brilliant navigator he was and how he himself could take a boat to India. The two other Khalasis must have been present when he said it and perhaps had backed him up in his boasting. Later I was told that Suak had once had some trouble with these people and had taken this opportunity to get his own back, but I do not think that he was really quite as bad as that. The way I looked at it was this, God himself had decided that these men must suffer and Suak had only been His instrument for this purpose. I told the poor fellows to speak the truth when I saw them brought in, but at first they would not believe me and it was only after a lot of beating up that they admitted to the Japanese that they had been boasting foolishly without any real intention of doing what they said.

After the comparatively free and easy life at Santiong, these men found it very hard indeed to settle down in jail. Latterly, I learned from them, the Japanese had been giving the men a great deal of freedom and they had been more or less able to go to and from the camp whenever they pleased. The police guard had been removed entirely. Even to think of freedom they had lost was enough to stand them hurling abuse, not only at Suak but also at myself. Indeed they abused everyone who had ever worked on the tug. I

found it very difficult to make these people understand that nothing could happen without the Will of God and that it was no use blaming human beings for the calamities that befall us.

It was not my fault that the Khalasis had been in jail, but somehow they were convinced that I had had a hand in it and as the days wore on, they fell to abusing and cursing me without ceasing. They made my life a misery. Sometimes even while I was praying, they would call out to the Lord beseeching Him to strike me dead on the spot and send me straight to hell. At times I was sorely tempted to return abuse for abuses, but Allah gave me unlimited patience to bear with them and when the storm of cursing and weeping was over and they had wiped their tears, He directed me to talk to them decently and try to make them understand that they must have patience until He saw fit to free them. Their cursing, I knew, could not have any effect on me, for my conscience was clear.

When I had been in jail on the previous occasion all the prisoners in our room had co-operated to keep up as reasonably decent a standard of living as possible. But by this time most of the young office clerks, who had been taken prisoner at the same time as myself, had been released. A new bunch of men was now brought into our room, from a distant town. These men were farmers ; and not only were they very dirty but the room was so desperately overcrowded, that at

night we had to lie flat on our backs with folded arms—shoulders touching one another. As the only one left from the previous crowd, I found the new lot unpleasant and unco-operative in the extreme and my own men, of course, were equally obstructive. To add to the general discomfort, the Bataks had brought lice and bugs with them, which got into every bit of my clothing, into my beard which had become fairly long and into my hair and even down my nails, plaguing me most dreadfully.

By this time I was beginning to look a sorry mess. I had given away my Loongyi to a fellow whose pants had been torn and so now I had only a shirt, trousers, one pair of under-pants and my black Malayan cap. The leather belt which had helped to keep my pants up had been taken away from me, and I had the greatest difficulty in keeping them up all the time. The shirt also had to serve me as a towel after a bath and after squeezing it out I used to put it on again. My body was covered with patches of ringworm and then having to wear a wet shirt made things very much worse, for the water helped to spread the disease.

I mentioned at the beginning that a wooden pot was kept in our room for us to use when we answered the call of nature. Well, we were now given orders that it should be cleaned as usual when the door opened in the morning and then kept in the sun all day, only coming in again when the

door was finally locked before sunset. This in itself was a torture, as we found it very hard not to pass urine during the day, and although we were taken out once at noon it was not enough. So we started using the entrance to our room for this purpose. The authorities saw it becoming dirtier and dirtier and could not have failed to notice the terrific stink, but perhaps because the other prisoners were so dirty they did not bother to change the rule.

For about a week we were not taken out of the room at all except for the usual quick bath twice a day. For me this was a special form of torture in that never, not for one instant, could I shake myself free of my colleagues from the *Chilka*, nor could I find a moment's real peace in which to say my prayers.

Then, one blessed day, fifteen of us were taken out for manual labour, and with brooms, shovels and buckets we marched through the streets of Sibolga to the residence of the commanding officer of the military police, about a mile from jail. This house had been previously occupied by a Dutch officer, but since then nobody had taken care of it and the garden was covered with wild grass and shrubs. I had always been a keen worker and even now, when I was told to do a certain thing, I did it with all my might. The Hei Ho and the Indonesian policeman, who had escorted us there, were, however, very sympathetic towards the Bataks,

the dirty crowd of men in our room, and so most of the heavy work fell on a few of us like myself. Fortunately we were allowed to eat the fruits or tapioca that we came across while cleaning the shrubs and at one o'clock, when two convicts from the jail brought our usual lunch out to us—oh joy of joys !—the cook in the house gave us some salt and chillies.

This cook was a Javanese lady who had married a Dutchman. After he had been interned had she served as cook in various Japanese bungalows, assisted by another young Javanese. Both of them were very kind to the four of us that were Indians, even giving us salt and chillies to carry back to jail and, now and again, a little Chutney to hide inside our caps. With the fresh air and the taste of salt in our food these days passed quickly.

After a while the Bataks were removed from our jail and a fresh crowd of men brought in. This crowd consisted of Javanese, Ambonese and Minadoes, mostly ex-soldiers of the Dutch Army. There was an old Eurasian among them who was a road engineer. He and I became very friendly as he was also of a religious turn of mind and, although a Christian, he had much the same attitude to our misfortunes as I myself.

The new men, presumably still under suspicion, were not taken out for work, so now there were only we four Indians going out to the garden every day.

There was a small pool in the garden that we had been clearing and the Japanese liked to bathe in it. Now the hydrant had gone wrong and so one of our jobs now was to fill this pool with water every day. The bungalow was on top of the hill and the stream from which we brought the water was far below it ; and so we had to carry buckets or tubs and draw water the whole day long so that the Jap could have his bath in the evening. This job was very strenuous and all four of us had become very weak, but we enjoyed it all the same because it kept us away from the gloomy atmosphere of the jail and out in fresh air and sunshine. Also there was the Javanese cook who fed us with rice and Chutney, a welcome change from the rice, tapioca and boiled leaves that we were given for lunch at the jail and which we still never refused when we returned from our heavy labours.

One day the lady cut her hand, and the Hei Ho, who did not know what to do, was astonished and realised for the first time that I was not the same as my fellow-prisoners.

Our days were passing off fairly well when one day in August, while a Hei Ho was taking us to work, an M. P. officer met us on the way and told the Hei Ho to take us back to jail. We wondered what had happened and thought that we would be taken out the next day, but when the next day came there was no sign of the Hei Ho— that was the end of our outing. This was not my

fault, just as it had not been my fault that the Khalasis and the Sukhani were in jail in the first place. But once again they decided to make me their scapegoat. How I longed for the company of my dear friend, Abdul Karim ! But he—so the Khalasis had told me—had been taken away to Boehit Tingh to work in a post office.

I had one consolation, however. Most of the recent entrants into the room were Javanese Muslims who joined me, morning and evening, in communal prayers.

So the month of Shabaan, in the Muslim calendar, slowly drew to its close and, as the last days dragged by, we thought of the holy month of Ramazaan, which was now approaching. Would we have the good fortune to be free by that time so that we could keep the yearly fasts ? The question preyed on our minds, but there was nothing we could do except pray to the Lord Almighty to help us fulfil this duty to Him. A few days later, when we asked the jailor if any arrangements would be made for us, he delighted us by saying that he would keep the meal that had been served to us at 4 p.m. until it was the right time for us to break our fast. We rejoiced that they were at least giving us facilities to perform this very important duty to God.

One of the Javanese Muslims had been to Mecca as a child and wore a (*Haji*) cap. He and I were looking forward to spending the Ramazaan

together, but a few days before fasting started I and the three Khalasis were removed to room No. 7. This was very small and already had two occupants, a Chinese merchant and a Minado soldier, to say nothing of four convicts who used to come in at night to sleep there.

The convicts, murderers and thieves though they were, used to be distributed amongst all the rooms every night and taken out during the day for work. Some of them who cooked the food were responsible for feeding us ; and certainly they took advantage of their position, feeding themselves well and giving us as little as they dared, and if we complained to the jailor nothing was done and the convicts simply took advantage of our helplessness more than ever. I can say with truth that I then experienced the lowest possible standard of living.

At last the Holy Month arrived and the first midnight meal served us was a little better than usual for, though it consisted of the usual rice, boiled tapioca and boiled leaves, there was, in addition, a little salt in it. A few chillies were also to be found in the rice for a treat. This was a very good start and gradually, we hoped, things would become better.

I spent most of the day in prayer and meditations, sleeping for a couple of hours in the afternoon. I also spent a few minutes chatting to the Chinese merchant and the Minado to refresh myself. Even in this Holy Month my countrymen

had not stopped baiting me, so I had to adopt a policy of complete silence towards them, speaking only when I was spoken to. In the evening we got the usual handful of rice to break our fast and after that I prayed until about nine o'clock and then slept till midnight. The rest of the night I spent in optional prayers and meditations.

Having decided on a policy of silence, I now thought of nothing else but God and day by day felt more and more certain that there was nothing for me to worry about. My Maker had brought me here, and only he could release me even if I was the worst enemy of the Japs instead of an innocent man. More and more my thoughts concentrated on the Omnipotent and I longed for the night and the boundless, infinite pleasure that I got from my prayers. In the few hours of sleep that I had, I dreamt of things pure and holy which I find it impossible to describe.

In spite of my intention to keep silent, there were times when I felt I must try and console my men who sobbed and wailed because they were unlucky to be inside a prison during Ramazaan. Few persons have the good fortune to realise the potentialities of the One God and the Khalasis had no spiritual resources to draw on, but at times, thanks to Allah, I was able to pacify their hearts, and together we prayed and hoped that we would be released on the 'Id Day, but the 'Id came and there was still no sign of a release. That day

when Muslims all over the world rejoice and wear new clothes, we remained behind bars and ate a handful of rice with boiled leaves and tapioca—and my three companions sobbed their hearts out.

I am a mere human being just like any other, and at that time I was a young man of just twenty-one years. If I did not weep with them, it was because faith alone sustained and cheered me. What power and courage could I have had to bear alone the extreme pain and hardship that I was undergoing ? I was nothing, am nothing, could have done nothing and would have collapsed from hunger and starvation if the Mighty Lord, the Supreme Ruler of the Universe, had not helped me. I might write hundreds and thousands of pages until my pen broke into pieces, but never could I give Him his due share of praise. To Him I owe my life.

CHAPTER XIV

OUT OF JAIL

It was the end of September 1944. The Ramazaan had come and gone, we had prayed for release, but we were still behind prison bars. But with every month my faith grew. Months come and months go, but He is Timeless, Infinite. Whatever the month, He is always there to listen to our prayers.

Then came the first of October 1944. We had washed our hands and were getting ready for our midday meal, when the door opened and the jailor announced that the four of us were to report to the jail office with the cane mat and the jug supplied to us by the jail. In a corner of the office Haji Zain-ul-Abedin, a prominent and wealthy Indian of Sibolga, was sitting. The Jap officer took out his sword and in an angry voice told us that if we ever so much as contemplated an escape we would be executed. In future, he said, the Haji would be responsible for us and we were to listen to him. We then followed the Haji out of the office of the devil—free men again.

Even before we reached Santiong, we met some of our men out working there. A few women

from the neighbouring houses rushed out to greet us with fruits and sweets and shook hands with us, as is the custom there. Later on we met all the other prisoners and every one of them gave me some money. Then there was our ship's barber, Sikander ; he had opened a shop in the town and was doing well. He came to me with all his implements and made me look civilised. I had my head clean shaved, but left my beard six inches long and with a Loongyi and cap looked a typical Moulvi. The final problem, what I should do for my food, was settled in no time by Mr. Khaleel. Once again that good and generous man did everything in his power to help me and, though I did not actually go and see him, feeling it might be unsafe for him, he kept in touch with all that happened to me and sent me food twice a day.

What I should have done without that food I do not know, for I had grown too weak to go out to work to earn my living as the other prisoners were doing. To supplement the food Mr. Khaleel sent me sometimes sweets bought from a hawker for my morning breakfast, and very often a small boy from the neighbourhood would bring me something and say that his mother had sent it for me, or Mahabir Singh would cook me Chapatis. I forgot to mention that there had been four Brahman sweetmakers on board the *Chilka* to cater for the deck passengers and as Mahabir Singh was the oldest—and the cleanest—

of the whole lot, I gladly accepted whatever he gave me. All four of them had had a very tough time, but from the beginning Abdul Karim had looked after them. As no Brahman eats food cooked by people of a different caste or religion, this amazingly good organiser had seen to it that they got the right food and had arranged for them to be given dry rations, which they then cooked themselves in their own pots.

After a couple of months, when I had gained some strength, I thought it was a bad thing to go on taking food from Mr. Khaleel without doing anything in return ; so when he assured me he had no objection to my going to his house, I went along every morning to help him in the bakery. Here the mischievous old gentleman, Abdul Jalil, better known to us as Khan Sahib, entertained us most amusingly with his "Shairy". He was supposed to be the best baker in the whole of Tapanuli and his cheerful company did much towards hastening my complete recovery.

At Mr. Khaleel's house I was given everything I wanted, including full liberty to indulge in my prayers, for even though I was out of jail I still kept up my optional prayers after midnight.

It was now the middle of November 1944, and life at the camp had taken a decided turn for the better for all of us, except old Ramazaan who passed away at the age of sixty-

six after having been two months in hospital. There was no white cloth to make his shroud and none could be found in the bazaar, but eventually an Indonesian agreed to sell us some privately for a hundred rupees a yard. Rehman, the butler, had saved some money and so paid three hundred rupees for three yards of white cloth, worth I should say, under ordinary circumstances, not an anna more than twenty rupees. So although old Ramzan had to be buried in a burial ground reserved for convicts, at least he got a shroud.

A few days later the Japanese ordered us to move into another camp, as Santiong would in future be used for Government coolies. Fortunately the new camp was not very much farther away. By this time most of our men were doing private business in the bazaar, some selling peanuts, and others working in a Japanese-controlled saw-mill, and I myself, of course ; was working for Mr. Khaleel.

Mr. Khaleel was still giving me my food, but he did not have enough room for me to sleep, and so when Ishaque, one of the better type Khalasis, opened a coffee shop I asked him to let me stay there instead of in camp. Ishaque lived alone and so welcomed the idea. Every evening after my last prayers, which I said in the Mosque, I would go to his shop and help him serve coffee and sweets. At midnight I laid my mat and pillow on one of his tables and went to sleep on it.

So now as well as being a baker I was also learning to become a 'restauranteur'.

The beginning of 1945 saw the Japs making elaborate preparations for the defence of the island. Around Sibolga they made use of every bit of rock and hill, installing heavy guns against the possibility of enemy troops trying to land there. Everyone was afraid that if the Allies did attempt to occupy the island, the whole town would be blown sky-high.

Once or twice we had air raid warnings and Allied planes flew over us but without doing any damage. There was a Japanese sergeant, whom I had met once while I was on the tug. He spoke good English and was very fond of English songs, and one evening we both sang English songs at Mr. Khaleel's place, very softly however. Next time he saw me he was on a bicycle and I was walking. He slowed his bicycle down and, without getting off, asked me how I was. In a voice scarcely above a whisper he told me that he dared not be seen speaking English to me again and then, looking very frightened and uneasy, he rode away.

So the Japs still suspected me. I reflected that it could only have been due to the mercy of the Great Lord that I was free to move about, and this in some way compensated me for my chief affliction at this time, the ringworm, which had started while I was in the jail and which had now spread

all over my body and on my face and hands as well. I could not find any cure for it. Once before this, Mr. Abbas Muhammad a Punjabi merchant who lived in Sidempuan, a town sixty miles from Sibolga, had paid for me to have some injections for it from a doctor, but these had made no difference and it was getting worse and worse.

In February, Abbas Mohammad's younger brother, Faiz Mohammad, together with his two friends, Devi Das and Abdul Gani, came down to Sabolga with a bullock cart loaded with articles to sell. All three of them were well-to-do cloth merchants by trade, but owing to the war they could not get fresh stocks and so had been obliged to devise some other means of earning their livelihood. In their bullock cart they were taking back all manner of miscellaneous goods to sell in Sidempuan, and this time they decided to take me too, so that a Hakim they knew could treat me. They approached the chief of the Indonesian police who was responsible for us and as they assured him that they would make themselves responsible for me while I was there, I was given a pass to go with them for one week only.

With Mr. Khaleel's blessings the four of us set out one morning, walking alongside the bullock cart. We kept on walking the whole morning until, at about one o'clock, we reached a place where a Chinaman lived with his Javanese wife and young daughter. Mr. Faiz Mohammad knew them very

well and asked them to allow us to cook our food in their house, but they would not hear of it. In stead they insisted on cooking it for us and altogether made us very welcome. The womenfolk cooked our meal while we chatted with the Chinaman. A clean mat was given to me for my prayers, and a clean white table-cloth was laid and the best crockery in the house was brought out for us. I felt a rush of home-sickness when I saw the white table-cloth and napkins, but all the same I enjoyed the meal very much indeed.

That night we rested in a village inn run by a Javanese woman from whom Mr. Faiz bought fish and Chutney, while he himself cooked our rice. We slept on the verandah of the inn and early next morning set off again, passing villages and rice-fields on our way. Another stop, this time at a small wayside restaurant, and then on again, walking and sitting on the cart in turns. The second night we reached the house of an Indian in a village called Batantarok. This old man was a Haji and he was completely blind, though he managed to walk about the house on his own. He had a very old wife but she prepared food for us and also gave us mattresses to sleep on. At the close of the third day we approached Sidempuan. This town is much higher above the sea than Sibolga and we felt quite cold when we entered it. The sun was almost setting and after evening prayers Mr. Abbas, who was there to welcome me, took me across to his house.

Mr. Abbas and Mr. Devi lived quite close to each other and as the ladies in the house of the former observed Purdah, arrangements were made for me to stay with Mr. Devi Das. Mr. Devi Das had married a Javanese. They did not have any children of their own, but they had adopted the baby of another woman whose husband had been killed by the Japs. Her name was Devi, and Devi's elder sister, Julia, a little girl of six, was also staying in the house to help Mrs. Das look after the baby. Their little three-roomed wooden house, exactly like all the other little Indonesian houses around it, had a sitting-room, a bedroom and a combined dining-room and pantry. The kitchen, which was also the bathroom, was built behind the dining-room and at the back of that, over a drain covered with wooden planks, was the W. C. The sitting-room had a cement floor covered with an Indian style carpet and in the corner of it was a wooden bedstead. It was here that I slept. My breakfast I was to have with Mr. Devi Das, and my lunch and my dinner with Mr. Abbas.

The day after I arrived Mr. Abbas lent me his copy of the Holy Quran. At the first opportunity I opened it and to my great joy found that it contained an Urdu translation. I cannot express in words how happy I felt ; it seemed to me that it had come straight from Heaven. I remembered how, many months before, I had longed for a Quran with an Urdu translation, and now I recalled all the stages that had led me to the Holy Book : my arrest,

the jail where I had rotted for six and a half months, my miraculous release, the ringworm that had led Mr. Abbas to take pity on me in the first place and the astounding fact that the police had given me permission to come to Sidempuan at all. Everything had happened as the Lord had planned and now, at last, I was to understand the Message of the Holy Book.

Allah, the supreme Ruler of the Universe, Who has power over every little thing on earth and in the heavens, had brought me here to learn His Message. It could not be His wish for me to return to Sibolga after only one week, whatever my police pass might say, and I resolved not to leave Sidempuan until I had read every word of the Quran. I read it in the morning, I glanced through it in the afternoon ; and I searched for the truth in the night. In fact, I opened it whenever I found time to do so. The moments of revelation increased as I became more and more absorbed in it, and there never seemed a moment when the verses of the Holy Book were not flashing across my mind. Wherever I went—on the road, in the bazaar or in the company of friends—with every step I took I thought of the beautiful words of Allah. How true they are, every word and every sentence fraught with wisdom ! This was the first time in my life that I was reading the Quran with its translation, the first time that I could really begin to understand it. And as I read on I felt more and more convinced that I need not worry about the Japanese or the Indonesian police.

The Quran is a great blessing to humanity, not only in times of danger and peril, but also in our everyday life. If we read it, and try to understand it, then most of our worldly troubles will fall into place, we shall see them as the minor things that they are and we shall achieve a sense of proportion. In the preface to his English translation Allama Yusuf Ali has summed up its value far better than I can. " It is a fountain of Mercy and Wisdom," he writes, " a warning to the heedless, a guide to the erring, an assurance to those in doubt, a solace to the suffering and a hope to those in despair ".

All those who have had the good fortune to understand the contents of the Book will, I know, agree with me that the Allama Sahib has divined its very essence.

You, who have followed my experiences so far, consider, I beg of you, what the Quran might mean to you if only you were prepared to devote yourselves to it for just fifteen minutes each day. Let me beg of you to get yourselves a copy *with a translation*, and as you study it consider the meaning of the Holy Words. You could ask for no better guide for your daily life.

CHAPTER XV

RAMAZAAN IN 1945

A month passed in Sidempuan without any interference at all from the police and I was beginning to feel that I could not go on taking the hospitality of Abbas and Devi without doing something for them in return. So instead of reading the Quran morning, noon and night, I gave up the afternoons to helping Abbas in his general stores, selling toilet articles, rubber shoes and cosmetics.

By this time I had also begun to feel at home with many of Abbas's friends, chief among them being Hakim Ghulam Mustafa Rawal, Hakim Sahib to us. The Hakim had a shop which, in the evenings, was our chief meeting place, as it was also for the other twelve Indian families, mostly Punjabis, living in Sidempuan. Many a happy evening I spent with them, going on from there to Devi's place to play chess or Chawsar, or to hear Abdul Gani sing.

Abdul Gani was Hakim Sahib's younger brother and a singer of great renown, in demand all over Sumatra. Who knows how many hearts had felt the wound of the arrow of love while listening to his singing ! Hakim Sahib was Gani's brother-in-law and was married to a Javanese

woman, a widow with a daughter of twelve named Singha. Gani's mother was also Javanese, a dear old lady who did all the cooking and whom I never once saw lose her temper.

But all this singing, chess-playing and gossip wouldn't get my work done. And now there was a great deal to do because my friend Gani, who was about the same age as myself, had decided that he wanted to start a bakery and sell cakes in the bazaar.

Gani had only a rough idea as to how cakes were made, while I, on the other hand, had become quite experienced after working with Mr. Khaleel and 'Khan Sahib'. I felt that Allah had intended me to be of use to Gani and so gave him every help I could in his new enterprise. Ours was no "soda-water" spirit, dying down as quickly as it came up. We meant business and very soon we were ordering baking tins and mixing bowls and making a small oven.

For our bakery Gani had chosen a corner of Hakim Sahib's kitchen and there, very early in the morning, Gani and I went to work. First there were the eggs to beat up and mix with molasses in a small bath tub. That was my job. Gani, meanwhile, arranged the wood beneath the oven and got the fire going, after which he would come over to help me beat up the eggs, a very exhausting job for one man on his own. Little Singha also helped with the beating and she greased the baking tins for us as well.

By eleven o'clock our cakes were ready and we would set out to deliver them to various tea shops in the bazaar. At first, to tell the truth, they were not particularly good, but later on as we became more expert with the oven, our "Kue Boloo," as the people of Sumatra called them, became extremely popular.

After the cakes had been distributed, I was free for a few hours to return to the Quran. The afternoons I spent as usual, serving in Abbas's shop, though sometimes I might go to Devi's fruit garden, a mile from the town, and work over there in the sunshine. How happy I was in Sidempuan, always occupied and surrounded by friends, Indians and Indonesians alike ! There was a big Mosque, too, very centrally situated, only a few minutes' walk from where we lived. I tried my best to say all my prayers in the Mosque and through visiting it five times a day I came to know quite a number of Indonesian Muslims, some of them Hajis. Living in the company of such men, it is not surprising that I began to think and feel the same way as they.

One thing that impressed me very much in Sumatra was the way the Malayans recited the Holy Quran. It was a real pleasure to hear them recite the words of Allah and I envied them, wishing that I could recite as beautifully. One day, while I was returning from the Mosque, I stood outside a house where the Quran was being recited. There was a

fairly large gathering of men and women inside the house and, as I stood outside listening, a young man came up to me. He soon found out, on questioning me, that I was keen on learning to recite the Quran like the Malayans and very kindly offered to help me ; he also said he would teach me Arabic.

The following day I started my lessons, an hour a day at his house. We were getting on fine, when one afternoon my teacher told me that the police were after him. They had warned him not to mix with me and never to allow me to go to his house. I could see that he was sincerely sorry to have to ask me never to visit him again. In the month of Ramazaan, he said, he would make an exception, and he assured me that it would then be quite safe for everyone if I joined the people who assembled in his house to recite the Quran during that month. From now on my Arabic studies had to be fitted in between customers at the general stores, and without a teacher I could not hope to make the same headway. However, I could at least console myself with the hope that Ramazaan was fast approaching.

During all this time in Sidempuan if I never wanted for anything, it was not because I held any shares in the bakery business. I did not even get a fixed salary, but was simply helping Gani, who, with other Indians there, had helped me. Yet somehow my pockets were never empty, and my friend Abdul Karim, now in the post office in Boekit Tingi,

just as the Khalasis had said, managed to send me twenty guilders every month. One day I was surprised to hear from Karim that Mr. Narayan Singh of Hari Bros., Padang, had given him one hundred guilders for me. Could this be anything else but the grand mercy of the Lord our Maker ? I had last met Mr. Singh in 1943 and this was 1945. During those two years I had had no communication from him, and yet he sent me this handsome sum for my out-of-pocket expenses.

Am I wrong to say that every day and every minute it was being proved to me that God is Great ? And that there is no power on earth greater than He ? He alone provides for our needs.

One day a Haji invited me to a 'Milad' which was being held in the building belonging to the girls' school. Here, I was told, a scripture class was held regularly every Friday for old men and women. The following Friday I started attending this class and learnt quite a lot of things which I had not known. The class began with one of the school girls reciting a passage from the Quran and then reading out its meaning in the Malayan language ; after that the master gave us a sermon based on the passage.

On Fridays, Gani excused me from working in the bakery so that I could attend this class, after which I would pay a visit to the graveyard and then go on to the Mosque for the Friday congregational prayers.

I went to the cemetery because not long before the young Devi child had passed away. She had been very ill and, although Mrs. Devi Das had done all she could to look after her adopted child, nothing could save her. At the time of her funeral it had been unanimously suggested that I should carry her to the burial ground. I shall never forget that dismal day. There had been heavy rain and the graveyard was very wet. To reach it we had been obliged to wade ankle-deep across a stream and coming back, after we had laid the little body to rest, I slipped on a stone while re-crossing the stream and, to my dismay, the rich clothes that had been used as straps to hold the child, and which I was still carrying, had got very wet.

After this, each Friday, it became my habit to spend at least half an hour in the graveyard by myself. Once Mrs. Devi Das, Singha and Nyaee, Devi's elder sister, accompanied me and they sat down while I read the Surat "Yaseen". In the graveyard I felt very close to God.

Like Muslims all the world over the Malayans eagerly look forward to the month of Ramazaan. They call it 'Puasa' and during this month they give a lot by way of charity to the poor and needy.

At last the long-awaited moon was seen and we started our fasts. Gani and I had decided that we would work in the afternoons and distribute the 'boloos' to various restaurants an hour before sunset.

Gani, his father and I broke fast together and said our prayers at home. Unlike the Indians, the Malayans do not usually say their evening prayers in the Mosque during Ramazaan, but most of them turn out for the 'Tarawih'. I attended the 'Tarawih' at the Mosque for the first few nights. Later, Gani, his father and I performed them at home. My Arabic teacher had also reminded me that I should be welcome at his place for the recitation of the Quran every night after the 'Tarawih' prayers were over.

During the Ramazaan the passages from the Quran that are recited are always the same. We sat round in a circle, each with a copy of the Quran in front of him, and recited aloud in turn. At the beginning I was very bad, but as I always sat next to my teacher I improved considerably and that in a very short time. My teacher's name, by the way, was Kamar-ud-din Siregar, and he not only pointed out my mistakes but also explained the meaning of some of the most important verses, so that I began to feel once more that I was really beginning to understand the Holy Book.

At midnight the big drum in the Mosque was beaten, and our assembly would disperse, the

Malayans going home to a meal and bed. On my way back home I always dropped in at a coffee shop for a cup of coffee, but after that I would continue to recite the Quran with its translation, or performed non-obligatory prayers until half past two. I would then call Abbas and wake him, and he in turn would wake up the ladies to prepare our morning meal. By four o'clock we had finished eating and we would then retire to our rooms, I to continue reading the Holy Book. When dawn broke, I walked to the Mosque for morning prayers, remaining there till sunrise, after which I returned home and went to bed. At eleven o'clock I was up again, ready to go to the shop.

During the afternoon the town looked like a city of the dead. Scarcely a soul was to be seen walking in the streets, and most of the stalls in the bazaar were closed. But no sooner did the sun begin to descend towards the western horizon than the whole place came to life again and the streets were soon swarming with people on their way to the Mosque. After afternoon prayers, which I said in the Mosque, it was time to go to Gani's place to start work on the cakes. We beat the eggs and the molasses, made the cakes, put them into the oven, took them out, arranged them in a basket and stepped out into the streets on our way to the bazaar. After this, with a good day's work behind us, we walked round the town waiting for the sun to set. So passed Ramazaan in Sidempuan. How

happy I was there ! So happy that the thought of happiness never entered my mind. I was not rich, I did not have many clothes to wear, but I had real peace of mind and heart. It was not only that the fear of the Japanese police had left me, it seemed as if all the earthly cares had been banished by my faith in God and that nothing in this world would ever have the power to hurt me unless Allah so willed it.

It was during Ramazaan that one of my Indonesian friends, a Haji, suggested that I married an Indonesian girl and settle down there, but I was too deeply engrossed in my prayers and to my devotion to God at that time to think of marriage. Also I still believed that God would one day restore me to my family in India and that I would marry the girl of their choice.

Perhaps those days in Sidempuan were the happiest and the best that I shall ever pass. Only people who have had similar experiences of what it means to commune with God can have any real idea of the glorious happiness that was mine, but the ordinary reader will surely believe me when I say that something, some power greater than myself, must have sustained me throughout the hardships, the brutality and bestial degradation and the extreme loneliness of the heart that I had been called upon to endure.

And now a change was coming. The Japanese in Sumatra had become very restless, large columns of men were being shifted from one town to another every day. One evening an Allied 'plane flew over and dropped some leaflets. An Indian living in a village nearby picked one up and brought it to us ; from it we learned about the Japanese retreat and the recapture of Burma.

In Sidempuan the news was received with mixed feelings; fear, however, prevailed. Rumours went round that the Japs would arrest all the soldiers who had been in the Dutch army, all the high Indonesian officials and a number of Indians. I thought I was certain to be on the list, but somehow it did not worry me in the least. Then one afternoon—I do not even remember the date, but it was an afternoon which was to change the atmosphere of the whole town—the news came that there was peace between the enemy countries. All I remember is that Gani and I were beating up the eggs when Ishwar Das, brother of Devi Das, came into the kitchen and whispered something into Gani's ears. After he had gone away, Gani told me that there was news of ' peace ' between the enemy countries. My eyes filled with tears, and a peculiar thrill went through me when I heard this news, though Gani, anxious not to build up hopes on a rumour, kept saying that it was impossible. I tried to convince him that nothing was impossible in this world.

Later on we learnt from Mr. Abbas that it was indeed true. The Japanese civil officer had called on the heads of all communities in Sumatra and told them that the Allies had dropped a bomb so powerful that it had entirely wiped out one of their towns. They were afraid that such bombs might be dropped on Indonesia and other Jap possessions, and so for the good of all their subjects they had sued for peace. There could be no doubt that peace was coming, though as yet no one dared demonstrate the overwhelming delight that everyone felt. No one dared openly to hang out flags or decorate the bazaar. But all the same Sidempuan was celebrating. You could see the happiness in the smiling faces, feel it in the air. Many Indonesian friends, who, for months, had been afraid to talk to me, now came up to me openly in the streets and congratulated me, saying that my fortune would soon take a turn for the better and that it would not be long now before I returned to my parents.

A few days later an Allied 'plane flew over and dropped leaflets, telling us to remain calm and do what the Japanese told us to do. The leaflet also said that we should prepare lists of all the men in prison camps, who should be told to wait patiently.

'Id was drawing near and there was great excitement among the inhabitants of Sidempuan. This was to be an 'Id under very different

circumstances from that of the previous year. A telegram came for me from Abdul Karim in Boekit Tingi, asking me to return to Sibolga immediately to prepare lists of our men.

The Indians in Sidempuan had done a lot for me, sheltering me during the bad days, and I felt it a poor return for their hospitality to leave them just before Id. But when I explained that the Allies might arrive any day and that it was essential for me to look after the men in Sibolga, they agreed to my departure. Those dear and gallant people, I do not know how I can ever repay them! God our Maker has seen everything and I pray to Him to look after those who had looked after me during those hard and difficult days.

Later I discovered that a new couple, who had moved in next door to Devi Das, had been sent there to spy on me, so the Japanese had not trusted me for one moment. Spies, policemen and civilians had watched me with hawk-like eyes, but above them all was the Lord, the Supreme Ruler of the Universe. He was for ever with me and guarded me against all evils. Through the Great and Supreme Mercy of the Master of the Heavens and the Earth, in Sibolga, in Padang and last but not least in Sidempuan there had been always someone to help me.

I have written so much and yet I still do not feel satisfied. I have not been able to find a suitable word to praise our Lord. Had I the genius of a Tagore, a Shakespeare or an Iqbal, then I might put before the world in flowing language the Greatness and Omnipotence of God, but His true Glory escapes the bounds of language and can only be felt in the heart.

CHAPTER XVI

RELEASE

The sun was setting as a ramshackle old bus, laden with passengers, entered Sibolga. The public bus stand, where I was deposited, stood at the corner of the entrance to the big bazaar. Adjacent to it, surrounded by barbed wire, stood the beautiful Mosque, supposed to be the finest in that part of the world. My luggage consisted of a small bundle containing a few bits of clothing and a pillow. Holding it under my arms, I went into the Mosque to meet Fazl-ur-Rahman the butler, who was always found there at that time of the day. He received me with tears in his eyes, tears of happiness. Only prisoners such as ourselves could understand what the cessation of hostilities meant to us. Briefly we reviewed the last four years, thinking of all those who had helped us during our hard times. Needless to say, Mr. Khaleel easily topped this list of our benefactors, and it was to his house, while we had been talking, that we had instinctively wended our way. On the road we met many of our acquaintances, and not one of them omitted to smile at me or to tell me that I would get home in no time. There were some who even pointed out that it was time for me to shave my

six-inch beard. Mr. Khaleel was as happy as any to see us, but behind his gay talk I could feel a sadness that we would be leaving him.

The beating of the drum at the Mosque signalled to us that it was time for us to break our fasts, for Ramazaan still had not quite ended. Food at Mr. Khaleel's was always delicious, but at this, our reunion dinner, it seemed to taste even better than usual. A few days later came the Id, perhaps the happiest ever. Happy in the complete sense of the word, not just for me, or the rest of the prisoners, but for the whole population of Sibolga, who celebrated the day as they had never done so before.

For me it was a day of visiting friends. A number of our Khalasis and firemen had married, and they pressed me to come and see their wives and to share their feasts. Then again there were all the Indonesians I knew, and they too called me to their houses and forced me to taste the rich food specially prepared for this occasion. Many, who had never dared to speak to me before, now came up and shook me by the hand. There was no fear of spies lurking behind me ; so I launched into the Malayan language whenever I could, and those who had never heard me speak it before, wondered how I had managed to learn so much in such a short time. 'Id at last came to an end, as even the happiest days must, and the next few days saw everyone back at their routine jobs—myself of course

at Mr. Khaleel's bakery—everyone of us eagerly awaited the arrival of the Allied Army of Occupation.

The Japanese, on the other hand, seemed to have lost all the vigour they had formerly possessed. Wherever one went, there they were standing about in listless groups or sitting with their faces in their hands. All their swagger had gone, and when they spoke to each other it was in a low, dispirited murmer. A number of them asked us what the British would be like and what sort of treatment would be given to them. Some of their higher officials committed suicide. As for the military police, not one of them was to be seen—and with them had also vanished the Indonesian personnel of that department. The Indonesian whose company was most sought after by the general public in Sibolga was the interpreter. A good number of innocent citizens owed their beatings at the hands of the Japs entirely to him, and it seemed that he was well aware of the sudden increase in his unpopularity, for he disappeared soon after the cessation of hostilities. Where did he go ? Where could he go ? Hundreds and thousands of his own countrymen were after him, anxious to chop off his head at the first opportunity.

One Minado friend of mine who had been in jail with me told me that, after I had left the jail, Suak had undergone the most appalling tortures and had been forced to confess, I do not know with

what truth, that he was a British spy. The Japs executed him in the jungle outside Sibolga. With all his faults Suak and I had been good friends. Even after he had told the Japs that I had been planning to escape with him, we had remained good friends. I had tried then to convince him that he had not been to blame for betraying either myself or the Khalasis. We were all, I was certain, being punished by God for our sins, however insignificant they might have been. Poor Suak ! During the last days that I had been with him in jail he had grown very thin, though previously he had been a very well-built young man. May his soul rest in peace !

One day the Chinese merchant who had been in jail with me invited me to a lunch which he was giving to all those who had been in the jail in Sibolga, a reunion of friends of ' the hard days '. Twenty-five men of many different nationalities assembled in his house, and when they were all seated I was asked to read a prayer. I read a few verses of the Quran and prayed for the welfare of all. This was followed by prayer from a Chinaman who was, I think, a Christian. None of us found any difficulty in joining in one another's prayers, for this was no ordinary congregation. Everyone present there could offer up his thanks to God for his survival. Every single one of us had been through very hard times. Each could understand the other's feelings, each of us knew what it is to live and suffer, each of us had discovered

some virtue in humanity even at the lowest standard of living. Of all this the world outside a prison camp can know nothing.

Some few mornings later, inspite of being very weak, I was in Mr. Khaleel's bakery, beating the eggs vigorously and feeling a delicious sense of achievement as the foam rose to the top of the tub. I used to get great pleasure out of the hope that my efforts would turn into something which men, women and children would eat with delight. What else happened that morning which was to be a turning point in my life ? How, for instance, did I look ? Well for a shirt I was almost certainly wearing one given me by Mr. Khaleel, it was torn and well-patched. The red " Loongyi " too, I remember, was not without a couple of holes either and a few patches. My face and my beard were full of the egg and 'gur' mixture that I had been beating, Fazl-ur-Rahman, of course, well he was sitting in his usual corner greasing tins and Mrs. Khaleel was giving him a hand. Her three-year old daughter was running hither and thither making the place as gay as possible. Khan Sahib and Rashid were hard at work putting the finishing touches to another tub of the mixture. Mr. Khaleel stood at the oven door, carefully watching the fire as he was preparing something very special, but none of us knew that morning just how good was the news in store for us.

A cream-coloured " Plymouth " Chrysler drew up outside Mr. Khaleel's house, and we recognised

it as belonging to Toean Besar Takotchi, the Japanese Commissioner of Sibolga. His head clerk, whom I have mentioned in the earlier stages of this narration, came out of it and made towards us, followed close behind by Idris Meah, the man in charge of firemen on the *Chilka*. Apparently Mr. Hoetabarat, the head clerk, had picked him up from our camp. He then told us that Toean Besar Takotchi wanted to see Fazl-ur-Rahman and myself. How times had changed! He had commanded us to go to his office many a time before, but never had he sent so much as a bullock cart to fetch us. But to-day, here was a 'Plymouth' come to take us to the Emperor's representative in Sibolga!

Sitting in the back seat of that magnificently upholstered car, I had one odd feeling, that my clothes were far inferior to the cloth covering of the leather seat. I had even forgotten how to sit comfortably in a luxury car. And there, sure enough, was Takotchi on the steps of the office, waiting to receive us. He greeted us with a smile and, bowing in the typical Japanese manner, led us inside, where he very politely asked us to sit on the sofa. Still smiling, he then began to talk, very softly and in the friendliest possible way, his shining white teeth never hidden for one moment. "Three British officers", he told us, "are coming to Sibolga to-morrow to take you back to your country". Then he went on to say that we should assemble in our camp, wearing our best clothes and looking

as spick and span as possible. Further he would come himself and personally inspect us at three o'clock in the afternoon. I reminded him that for most of us our 'best clothes' were not much better than the ones he could see us wearing, to which his reply was a soft 'asoldiska,' which is like saying, "Oh ! I see".

We returned to Mr. Khaleel's full of a joy that only our hearts could feel. I told the tindal to round up the men and to make sure that they got to the camp at three o'clock, also to get them to try to settle up any debts owing to Indonesian friends and shop-keepers. I went round myself to see the wives of the men who had married into the country to see if they wanted to come out with us, and found four of the seven Indonesian girls willing to go to India with their husbands. The good news spread like wildfire among our men and they did not have to be told to settle up their debts.

At three o'clock, when we were all at the camp, three Japanese trucks arrived bringing shirts, trousers, shoes, pillows, towels, tooth brushes, soaps and socks which the Japanese officers then distributed among us. The shoes were very big and did not fit most of us and, although I took my share of the clothing, I continued to wear the white shirt and Pyjamas given to me at Sidempuan.

The following afternoon we assembled once again at the camp with all the Japanese officers present. A little after three a "Dodge" drove in with the Union Jack fluttering on the bonnet. The car stopped outside the camp entrance and three British officers stepped out of it. They walked straight towards us, taking no notice whatsoever of the Japanese officers saluting on either side. The leader, a Captain in the R.A.M.C., stood in front of us and began speaking in very good Urdu. He told us that we would be taken to Padang by car the following morning, and from there we would be flown to Singapore and then to India. He next inspected the very sick prisoners and after that took a look at the four Indonesian wives, giving them permission to come with us. Toean Takotchi then gave him full details about us and finally handed us over.

The following morning eight trucks stood outside our camp, and men and women from all parts of Sibolga swarmed in the streets to bid us farewell. At nine o'clock the British officers came from their bungalow and gave orders for us to board the trucks. I lined the men up and as I called out their names, they started one by one towards the trucks. Getting them inside was no easy matter, for each of them on his way to the truck was shaking hands with as many of the bystanders as possible. Still everything was going on quite nicely and in fairly good order until a shriek attracted my attention. This came from an old lady, the mother of Asma, one

of the brides accompanying us. She was hanging on to her daughter like grim death and kicking up no end of a rumpus. " My daughter shall not go to India; she shall not; I forbid her to go, I forbid it!" she screamed. Asma was trying her best to free herself from her mother's all too violent embrace, but she too was bawling her head off. All the other brides had taken their seats and now the old lady turned to me, pleading with me to let Asma remain with her. But I could not interfere. I told her that if she had not wanted Asma to leave her, then she should not have given her in marriage to an Indian. It was only too obvious that the girl wanted to accompany her husband and at that moment she twisted herself free and, rushing towards the truck where he was sitting, quickly boarded it.

It must have been about ten o'clock before we were ready and the Captain could give the order for the trucks to move. The Japanese drivers obeyed with alacrity and immediately the first truck moved forward, the others following at correct intervals. The starting of the trucks was a signal for a great cheer from the Indonesians and as we drove through the streets lined everywhere with people, more voices now took up the cry, " Selamat Djalan ", " Selamat Djalan ".

Captain Edwards had told me to accompany him in the Dodge; so after all the trucks had left, I shook hands with all the people pressing round the

car and then climbed into the back seat with Lt. Prosser. The Captain himself was at the wheel with his assistants beside him. Toean Takotchi had gone ahead to see that everything was in order for the trucks and we passed him on his way back. He stopped his car and when I got out of the Dodge to shake hands with him, he wished me the best of luck, adding he was glad to hand us over to the British officers. We had, he said, been a fearful responsibility, and now that he had got rid of us he was feeling very light and happy.

At noon we arrived at Sidempuan, where I went straight to Hakim Sahib's house. Here there was just time for a quick lunch with Gani and the rest of the family, but even so I managed to see as many of my friends as I could. I found that Mr. Abbas's wife was very ill and at my request Captain Edwards went in to see her. There was very little hope for her living, he told me later, and she was already much too ill to be moved, or he would have had her flown to a hospital in India.

Here at Sidempuan I met again with my great friend, Abdul Karim, who had come in with a load of prisoners from Boekit Tinngi. That evening he was with us when we set off in a " caravan " and his company made up in part for the loss of Mr. Khaleel. Up till now Captain Edwards had very kindly allowed Mr. Khaleel to accompany us, but now the time had come to him to say goodbye. He was in tears as we left him. As for us, words

were not enough to thank him for all that he had done for us, but he must have felt our gratitude. His sad little figure was the last thing we saw as we rolled out of Sidempuan.

That night we halted at a small town called Kotanopan. Arrangements had been made in advance for our food and a meal was waiting for us in the empty police barracks, where we also slept. Early next morning we started on a drive that was to last the whole day except for a short pause about two o'clock, when Captain Edwards stopped the car beneath a shady tree just long enough for us to eat a few tins of 'K' rations. Then on again to overtake the trucks just before our arrival in Boekit Tinngi at five o'clock. Here we ordered tea for everyone in a hotel, and then the trucks moved off again to Padang. Abdul Karim and I, however, got special permission to remain behind in Boekit Tinngi for one night, so that I might meet our friends and see something of the beautiful town, going the next day to Padang by truck.

In Padang, the Central Jail, which did not have any convicts in it, had been turned into a transit camp for all the recovered P. O. W.'s, and here we were made very comfortable. For me there was also a glad re-union with Mr. Jilani and all the others who had helped me during my stay in that town.

Three aeroplanes a day used to fly to Singapore with batches of men. A great number of Australian

and British prisoners were got away first, but on the 30th of September the first batch from our camp was flown to Singapore. That evening the Indonesian extremists started demonstrations and we were told not to move out of the camp. This was a great disappointment to Karim and myself, as we wanted to continue visiting the friends we had made when I had been on the tug. Fortunately none of the extremists entered our camp, but we heard there had been a good deal of street-fighting. Then, on the 2nd October, Lt. Prosser told us that the situation was becoming so grave that extra 'planes would be flown in to evacuate the lot of us.

The next morning a fleet of buses took us to the aerodrome, where three Dakotas were waiting. This was going to be my first flight in an aeroplane and I felt very excited. On top of that it was unbelievably wonderful to feel that, at last, I was on my way home. In two hours we had reached Singapore. Here, at the aerodrome, we were met by members of the NAAFI organisation, who distributed cigarettes and sweets. Then we were sent on trucks to Buller's camp, the transit camp for Indians recovered from Japanese-occupied territories. Here we met up with our comrades who had been flown out before us.

The following morning we were addressed by a Major-General whose name I have forgotten. I was talking to my comrades after this was over,

when a handsome young Captain approached me and said, "Assalamo Alaikum Maulana Sahib". I recognised him at once. It was Shamin, a very old acquaintance of mine. I pelted him with questions, and within a few minutes knew how and where all my relations and friends were. After three years and eight months I was getting the first news of my people.

Shamin said that he would send them a telegram to let them know I was all right, and that evening he got permission from the Commandant to take me for an outing. These outings continued nearly every day while I was in Singapore and during these he introduced me to his friends and took me to see "The Happy World", Singapore's famous amusement park.

From this camp, every day batches of men were either flown off or sent by sea to India. But two weeks had passed, but still my turn never came and I was feeling very anxious; so Shamin said he would ask the Camp Commandant to send me as soon as he could. A batch of twenty soldiers were due to go. I was put in charge of them and sent to the aerodrome. That morning the 'plane could not fly because of bad weather. We waited for three days in a different transit camp and then we were flown to Rangoon, stopping on our way at Kuala Lumpur and Penang. At Rangoon we were put in a camp once again, but a day later

I was taken to No. 58, Indian General Hospital, which was meant for the V. C. O.'s. The doctor had found, on examining me, that I had a skin disease and insisted that I remained there until I was cured. He also said that since I was very weak, I must be given plenty of vitamins to help in the cure. So there I was, almost a prisoner again.

CHAPTER XVII

HOME AT LAST

So near and yet so far ! In Rangoon, in hospital, I was almost a prisoner again. Worst of all, I was being forced to swallow all manner of medicines during the day and was not allowed to leave the hospital at any time. All the same I did not remain idle. The nurse gave me a lot of writing paper and I started writing to my parents, relations and friends. The only letter, however, that got through to me in reply was from my friend Sadri Ispahani. In it he mentioned an uncle of his living in Rangoon, and through it I was able to get permission from the Sister to go out to pay a call on him. To my great disappointment he was not at home when I called, but the following morning he came, saw me at the hospital and invited me to dinner with him the same night. His name was Mr. Ghulam Hussain Shirazee.

By this time I was feeling much stronger, and on the first day that I was allowed to go to town I decided to explore the dock area, feeling sure that I would come across some *ex*-"Dufferins." Walking along the quayside my eyes fell upon the bows of a steamer and I read the name *Jalayamuna*.

That belonged to the Scindia Steam Navigation Company, a company in which the *Dufferin* had a monopoly, every ship taking at least one cadet on board. I calculated that the third mate would be the most likely person to have been in my batch on the *Dufferin*. The 'Sukhani' on duty told me that 'the Chota Malam Sahib' was asleep, but the 'apprentice Sahib' was on the other side of the deck. I went over; and whom did I see? Kundu, who was one year my junior on the *Dufferin*. He shook hands with me, and we were talking away when someone ran out of a cabin and pounced on me. This was Chimney, a Sikh one year my senior on the *Dufferin*. He hugged me and said they had heard I was lost. Before I knew where I was, I had met even more *Dufferin* cadets and was soon visiting them every day. Also I got permission from the hospital to dine with them on the 'Divali' night. There was another Scindia ship in port with other *ex*-cadets whom I had known. One of them, Suri, got a tin of Horlick's Milk from their canteen and presented it to me, so that I might get strong even more rapidly.

One night Suri came to the hospital at nine o'clock and asked me to come for a ride with him. Hospital regulations, however, do not permit any patient leaving hospital after seven o'clock. Suri knew this, but he insisted that I must go with him, and so went up to the nurse to ask her himself. She repeated the hospital rules and said that she could

not allow me to go, but she had a soft heart and when I told her that I had met my friends after a very long time, she promised not to betray me if she found I had gone out without her permission. Suri took me to his ship first, where we were joined by others, and we all drove off to see the most famous Pagoda in Burma. I was dropped at the hospital before eleven o'clock, and I went into my ward through a window which had been kept open.

Twelve days passed, and still there was no news about when I was to leave the hospital. Then one morning I was told a wire had come from a high Government official that I should be sent as soon as possible, as my elder brother was getting married on the eighteenth. The same morning I was taken to the aerodrome, but there was no seat on the plane ; so next day I was put aboard the S. S. "Ethiopia". The "Ethiopia" sailed from Rangoon with recovered P. O. Ws. and men and women of the fighting forces going home on leave. I got a berth in a second class cabin with a Gurkha and two other Punjabis. Fortunately the third mate of this ship was Douglas, who had passed out of the *Dufferin* with me and had actually joined the company the same day. He took me to his cabin whenever he was off watch and fattened me up on chocolates. I also became friendly with the ship's medical officer, Dr. Austin.

The three days that we were at sea were very pleasant indeed, although I could hardly wait as

I wanted to get back home. On the night of the twelfth of November we took the pilot on board at the mouth of the Hooghly and steamed up the well-known river. Till very late that night I kept awake, watching the shores of my beloved Bengal. By the time I got up on deck the next morning we had reached Budge Budge. My excitement knew no bounds as we approached the Princep Ghat, and eagerly I looked to see if I could spot my parents on the quayside. A car drove up and a few ladies got out of it. I recognised my eldest sister first and then I saw my father and my mother. I started waving a handkerchief at them and felt like crying. I could not believe that I was actually seeing my people standing there on the shore.

The "Ethiopia" took a very long time to berth, and to me it seemed an eternity. In the meantime other cars had arrived and there was uncle Nazim-ud-Din, conspicuous with his red fez and with his walking stick. That boy must be my younger brother, Shahed, and the girl my sister, Hashmat, but they had grown too big for me to recognise them properly. At last the "Ethiopia" got alongside and Lt. Hussain, the Seamen's Welfare Officer, came up and spoke to me. My brother Wasi, he said, in reply to my questions, was getting married to Zaffer, uncle Nazim-ud-Din's daughter, and my eldest brother had already been married. Now I could go ashore and find out the rest of the answers myself.

Through the kindness of Lt. Hussain I was the first to land from the steamer and as I approached the crowd of relatives who had come to welcome me, my father rushed forward and took me in his arms. He clasped me so tight that my delicate body nearly broke in pieces. Then my dear mother nearly hugged the breath out of me. "No one but God, no one but God," she kept saying, "No one but God could have brought you back to me". It was into God's hands she had given me when I sailed away on the *Chilka* and now once again she thanked Allah for sending me back safely to her. While I was in my brother's embrace, my eldest sister kept patting me on the back and asking me if I recognised her husband. Her eyes were full of tears. She kissed me and then I shook hands with all the others present.

Just then my eldest brother arrived. I was seeing him for the first time in seven years, and as I hugged him I burst out crying. I tried my best but I could control my tears no longer and I wept freely while I embraced him. My father, my mother, my eldest brother and Lt. Hussain and I got into one car and drove to the Viceregal Lodge to enter my name in the book, while the others drove home. The Lodge was being used as a reception centre for recovered prisoners of war. We dropped Lt. Hussain at the office and then went home ourselves.

Home after three years and eight months! My second brother, Wasi, arrived on the fifteenth

for his wedding. With the others I went to Howrah Station to meet him, but on the platform I kept aloof from them when his train came in. As he walked past me I greeted him. Casually he acknowledged me politely and had begun to walk on when suddenly he realized who I was. Then we both hugged each other. We were meeting again after six years.

There was great feasting for the next few days and Wasi's wedding, which took place on the 18th November, was a very grand affair, solemnised at No. 8, Theatre Road. I was so glad I had got back in time, for I had missed the weddings of all my other brothers and sisters.

And here perhaps my story ought to come to a Happy ending. But, to tell the truth, although several weeks had now passed since the end of the war, my return home was still a big shock to me. Here, in Calcutta, time had not been standing still as it seemed to have been doing in the prison camp, and I felt I had been left far behind everyone. Then the extreme comfort and luxury that I got at home dazzled me, so much so that the hard days I had gone through seemed as unreal as a dream. What I needed most was complete rest and quiet, so that I could adjust myself gradually, but my relations were too excited at having me back to leave me to myself and inspite of all their kindness, almost because of it, I found myself absolutely lost. I did not seem to be able to do the right thing at the right time, I did not know

how to settle down and I drifted along without any proper aim or object, missing desperately the quiet hours of prayer that I had come to rely on as a prisoner.

I started to work in the pilot service, but instead of improving steadily, my health became worse and worse. But Allah, the Supreme Ruler of the Universe, did not desert me. In April 1947 I had to resign from the pilot service on account of weak eyesight. The following month, however, I accepted an offer to join an Inland Water Transport Company which operated all over Assam, Bengal and Bihar.

No one could call my experiences during that three years and eight months in the least pleasant; but strangely enough, now that they are all over, I find I have pleasant memories. I remember each and every incident that formed a part of those long and weary years, but when I analyse them, there is only one thing that remains constant, and that is the grace of God Almighty.

God Almighty has had mercy on me. He has shown me the way to Truth and I have learned to depend on Him for everything that is needful. He does everything for the good of His creatures, He is Oft Forgiving and Most Merciful. I do not know how I can thank Him fittingly for all His mercies. My hard days had gove by, and I had returned home drifting and unstable, without any aim

or object. I knew and felt I was not doing my duties to my parents and even though I tried my best to please them, success would not come my way. I had lost all power to concentrate on worldly things; but one thing I did not lose, and that was my faith in Him. Whenever I did something wrong, I turned to Him and asked His forgiveness, help and guidance.

Patiently I went on doing my work and trying my best to please my parents, and it is my sincere belief that God Who understands all things has rewarded me in many ways, and the best of them is that I am getting married to my cousin Ayesha.

Ayesha was a little girl of twelve when I first got the feeling that I wanted to make her my partner for life. There was something in her that convinced me that she could be my best friend and companion, but she was very young then and the matter was never given serious thought.

Inside the prison in Sumatra I became convinced that I could not find a better girl than Ayesha to be my wife, and I told this to my friend, Abdul Karim, explaining to him who she was. Back in India I tried to marry her, but found it was impossible. I then resigned myself to the Will of God and prayed to Him to give me the girl whom He thought would be best suited to me.

At the end of August, in 1947, while I was at Dighar, in Bihar, I received orders transferring me to Narayangunge. Before I had left for Narayangunge,

a letter came from my mother in which she mentioned that she and my father were going to Dacca to say good-bye to our relatives before they left for Mecca on the Pilgrimage. Ayesha was in Dacca, and as I read my mother's letter I got the feeling that the Lord had kept Ayesha for me. I did not tell this to anyone, but noted it down in my diary. With my father and mother, I travelled to Dacca where we spent seven days, but there were no developments till the last night, before they left for Mecca. My mother first and then my father asked me what I thought of Ayesha. Can anyone imagine what my feelings were ? I am sure you can all guess what my answer was. Then on the seventh of September 1947, my parents proposed informally to Granny Peri Bano and obtained her consent.

To-day is Friday, the twenty-seventh day of February 1948. I am writing this aboard the steamer *Bhadra*, a stern-wheeler plying between Manikgunge and Elashin. I am on my way to Manikgunge where I shall board the steamer *Argo* and proceed to Narayangunge. I shall, Insha Allah, be there to-morrow to receive my mother and many other relatives and friends who are coming from Calcutta to celebrate my wedding with Ayesha.

Only seven days are left until the time when, God willing, Ayesha will begin a new life with me. The Lord is Great and Merciful. To Him I owe the many bounties that He has bestowed on me, to Him I owe Ayesha, to Him I owe my life.

May Allah help us all to do our duty to Him, to my parents and to all mankind : May He lead us on the right path and give us all happiness in this world and in the Hereafter. *Amen !*